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Zappa's Remembrance of a Forgotten Style: The Relationship Between Frank Zappa and Doo-Wop as Illustrated in Cruising with Ruben & The Jets

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THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Music in the
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by

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

ZAPPA'S REMEMBRANCE OF A FORGOTTEN STYLE:
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FRANK ZAPPA AND DOO-WOP AS
ILLUSTRATED IN *CRUISING WITH RUBEN & THE JETS*

One of Zappa's many cherished styles of music was the doo-wop of the mid-1950s through the early 1960s. His love for the style culminated in 1968 with a poor-selling and often forgotten doo-wop record, *Cruising with Ruben & The Jets*. While the record earned little praise from critics and fans, Zappa considered it as a landmark of his early career, as evidenced in his autobiography. This thesis investigates Zappa's relationship to doo-wop and "perversion" of the style as it culminated in *Cruising.*

As revealed through autobiographical entries and interviews with Zappa, Ray Collins, and other collaborators, Zappa devised his unique doo-wop style from the early onset of his career until *Cruising*'s release in 1968. Moreover, he utilized his collagist composition techniques similar to those of postmodern American art music composers of the 1960s such as George Rochberg and David Del Tredici. Although outside of the realm of art music, *Cruising* is a highlight of Zappa's early style and one of his finest representations of postmodernity.

KEYWORDS: Frank Zappa, Doo-Wop, Collage, George Rochberg, Postmodernism

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I am grateful to the many members of the musicology and music theory faculty who have helped shape me into a better writer, researcher, scholar, and person. Dr. Karen Bottge generously donated several textbooks which proved invaluable to this thesis; Dr. Jennifer Campbell taught me the necessity of focused writing and research; Dr. Kevin Holm-Hudson provided insightful comments about Zappa as he compared to other rock musicians of the 1960s; and Dr. Diana Hallman helped open my mind to a myriad of perspectives and life stories different than my own. To the many others who have encouraged, inspired, or pushed me through my musicological journey – thank you.

Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Ben Arnold, the chair of the thesis. Although not well-acquainted with Zappa prior, the many hours of brainstorming, literature recommendations, and topical conversations proved to be some of my most enriching experiences at the university. My time working with him, more than any other, has shaped this thesis and my views on music and its worth. As Boethius once wrote: “Music is so naturally united with us that we cannot be free from it even if we so desired.”

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The life and music of Frank Zappa occupy a strange place within the canons of art music and rock 'n' roll. In the fields of musicology and music theory, scholars seldom pay serious attention to the wacky "in-yer-face" satirist or to those who often take on the title of "Zappologists." Throughout the somewhat small body of literature surrounding Zappa, many authors draw parallels between him and other composers and artists, but they seldom make salient arguments regarding Zappa's style, where it comes from and why his music seems like an anomaly of the Twentieth Century.

While standing among Twentieth-Century compositional giants and philosophers such as Arnold Schoenberg, John Cage, and Igor Stravinsky, it is understandable for scholars to exclude or only briefly touch on Zappa and his career from their writings. His music is incredibly distinct, but Zappa was perhaps a greater musical imitator than creator. He borrowed compositional methods including rock 'n' roll, doo-wop, jazz, and art music. Throughout his career, Zappa wrote about and verbally discussed his stylistic origins, influences, compositional methods, and the ever-present philosophy surrounding his music. Considering his often-verbalized love of Stravinsky, Varèse, and Muddy Waters, these artists are a useful starting point in explaining his music. Each of these composers represents a different aspect of Zappa's musical style, from his experimental Varèsian percussion to his bluesy brand of rock 'n' roll, but there is another significant stylistic influencer which occupies a much smaller, but still important space in Zappa's oeuvre: 1950s and early 60s doo-wop.

Doo-wop boldly appears throughout Zappa's early repertory from his time at Studio Z in 1963 (as heard on *Mystery Disk*) through the dissolution of The Mothers in

1970. Throughout his career, doo-wop played an important role, as he often composed in the style he later used as a rehearsal tool.[1] No listener could deny the influence that 1950s doo-wop and R&B had on the composer, considering its pervasiveness in his repertoire. Zappa offers the listener both sincere and satirical variations on the doo-wop style on each record throughout his early period; yet the link between him and the style is widely unaddressed.

With such an incredibly large and varied output of music, it has proven difficult to contextualize and understand Zappa the man and Zappa the composer. Zappologist, Kevin Courrier, also acknowledges Zappa's relationship with doo-wop, but the description only comes as a scant aside in a large biobibliographical text.[2] Courrier's book, *Dangerous Kitchen: The Subversive World of Frank Zappa*, attempts to explain his style by placing Zappa within a wider compositional lineage, but he does not fully explain his argument, ignoring the role of doo-wop, R&B, and jazz.

As a means of broadly explaining Zappa's style, Courrier places Zappa in an abridged ancestry of American music of William Billings → Charles Ives → Frank Zappa.[3] His description of Ives as a secluded, self-taught, misogynist is misleading and mostly incorrect, but his overarching argument implies that we can better understand Zappa by understanding the relationships between him and his influences.[4] Like Ives,

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[1] "George Duke on Frank Zappa," (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERFUbX648S4).
[2] Kevin Courrier, *Dangerous Kitchen: The Subversive World of Frank Zappa* (Toronto, Ontario: ECW Press, 2002), 32.
[3] Ibid., 53-55.
[4] Courrier does not explicitly make this claim, but during his discussion of Ives he explains "[Ives] put his own stamp on American music by combining the roots of American folk music – church hymns, campfire songs, popular ballads – with a complex and dissonant counterpoint that provided the supportive framework for all the melodic lines in the score" (Courrier, 54). He describes the myriad of musical elements present in Ives's work, and they take on a similar role in Zappa's music. He continues, "[Zappa] worked in the popular music arena of rock 'n' roll, where he could freely mix musical genres and make his

Zappa borrowed heavily from a myriad of musical traditions, holding none as inherently sacred, thus leading to crossover, collage, imitation, etc. As one cannot fully understand Ives without acknowledging his relationships with popular music, art music, hymnody, etc., I argue that Zappa's music will remain anomalous until we understand these similar stylistic relationships. This stylistic understanding means that an investigation into his doo-wop inspiration and compositions are of seminal importance.

With such little interest surrounding the original doo-wop of the 1950s and 60s, it is understandable that no scholars have truly investigated how Zappa's affinity for the style and how it affected his career and music. Doo-wop remains as a "forgotten third of rock 'n' roll" with limited scholarship surrounding the topic, even twenty-seven years after the publication of the first scholarly book dedicated to it.[5] Keeping in line with Courrier's idea of understanding the composer through identifying a musical lineage, this thesis is a documentation of the history and philosophy of Zappa's strange recreations of doo-wop music. Although he did not regularly write in the style following 1968, this thesis primarily examines his style through an exploration of his anomalous and often forgotten doo-wop record, *Cruising with Ruben & The Jets.*

Literature Review

Although most music history texts omit or skim over Zappa and his style, some scholars acknowledge the relationship between the composer and doo-wop. The link

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sociologically comic observations on absurd and bizarre behavior… Zappa became a living embodiment of Thoreau's idea that 'natural objects and phenomena are the original symbols or types which express our thoughts and feelings'" (Courrier, 55). Courrier spends a lengthy section of his introductory chapters contextualizing Zappa with Ives and other composers. While not expressly stated, Courrier believes that to understand Zappa, one must understand his predecessors.

[5] Dr. Anthony J. Gribin & Dr. Matthew M. Schiff, *Doo-Wop: The Forgotten third of Rock 'n' Roll* (Iola, WI.: Krause Publications, 1992), 7-8.

between Zappa and doo-wop is overt in his 1960s records, but few authors have investigated the nature of the relationship. With the style being an important facet of his musical output, *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Music* (2004) is one of the only music history textbooks to reference doo-wop and Zappa. It states:

> Zappa, Frank (1940-93) American composer and rock musician. Zappa formed The Mothers of Invention in 1964, and their first album *Freak Out!* (1966) capitalized on the psychedelic styles of the time, while containing strong elements of parody; his music drew on styles from rock, free jazz, and avant-garde concert music, to electronics and doo-wop.[6]

The short paragraph briefly mentions Zappa's use of the Synclavier and serious orchestral recordings with the London Symphony Orchestra and Ensemble Modern. The few academic textbooks to mention Zappa, such as Taruskin's *Music of the Late Twentieth Century*, often only mention Zappa as an avant-garde rock 'n' roller.[7] The inclusion of doo-wop in the Cambridge textbook is significant, as it acknowledges the importance of doo-wop throughout Zappa's repertoire. While including doo-wop in this list of styles is not controversial, the few non-Zappologist scholars who have written about the composer often omit it, instead discussing biobibliographical information.

The current body of Zappalogical literature is fairly sparse, with many of the seminal texts being biobibliographical.[8] Non-biobibliographical writings are in much shorter supply and are of high diversity. Some have focused on Zappa's style and its

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[6] *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Music* edited by Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople (Cambridge, UK.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 675.
[7] Richard Taruskin, "The Sixties," in *Music in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York, NY.: Oxford University Press, 2009), 328.
[8] Examples of these books being Kevin Courrier's *Dangerous Kitchen*, Ben Watson's *The Negative Dialectics of Poodle Play,* and Kelly Fischer Lowe's *The Words and Music of Frank Zappa*, to name a few.

trends,[9] while another subset of Zappologists highlights specific works or records. Jeffrey Daniel Jones's dissertation *Frank Zappa and his Conception of Civilization Phaze III* focuses on Zappa's use of the Synclavier, his final record, and *Lumpy Gravy*. Martin Knakkergaard's chapter in *Frank Zappa and the And* takes on the heroic effort of transcribing portions of and analyzing one of Zappa's most complex early works, "Brown Shoes Don't Make It." There are, of course, many other writings about specific works, songs, or projects, such as *An Evening with Wild Man Fischer* (1968) and *Freak Out!.* For example, the ambitious 2010 documentary, *The Freak Out List* attempts to categorize and explain Zappa's style, as dictated by the list of influences in the liner notes to the 1966 record.[10] With such a great array of topics, few have attempted to fully explain his style and influences while listing his significant works, partly because of the lack of published scores.

With few extant scores, Zappa's repertory has proven difficult to analyze, resulting in scholarly avoidance, unless scholars transcribe the music. Most of Zappa's records have wide variations in style, which may range from doo-wop to hard rock to jazz, and if the analyst considers live recordings of the music, the stylistic issues compound in complexity. Only a few authors have made and discussed these transcriptions, with even fewer writing and publishing on them. The majority of Zappa music studies revolve around historical and biobibliographical information, general stylistic analyses, and the occasional transcription-based analysis.

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[9] Examples being *Zappa and Jazz: Did it Really Smell Funny Frank* (2015) by Geoff Wills, "A New Lydian Theory for Frank Zappa's Modal Music" (2014) by Brett Clement, and "What to Listen for in Zappa: Philosophy, Allusion, and Structure in Frank Zappa's Music" (2013) by Matthew Ferrandino.

[10] *Freak Out List*, directed by Chrome Dreams, 2010.

Although some Zappologists have analyzed, transcribed, or written about some Zappa's most complicated pieces such as "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," "RNDZL," and "The Black Page," it would prove nearly impossible to discover each embedded reference, even if scores were available. "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," for example, is a seven-minute stylistic kaleidoscope from *Absolutely Free* (1967) whose breadth includes twenty-two individual sections.[11] Knakkergaard's "Zappa and Modernism: An Extended Study of 'Brown Shoes Don't Make It" breaks down each section, discusses the styles within, and details the overwhelming amount of collage hidden behind the complex compositional methods. Knakkergaard argues that "It is an oeuvre in which subtle correspondences between music styles, titles, lyrics, texts and more, critically reflect central aspects of modern culture and human life in a psychological, sociological as well as philosophical exposition."[12] Knakkergaard's analysis is incredible, because of his transpositional skills, as well as his ability to highlight specific, obscure references, such as Edgard Varèse's *Density 21.5*.

For most, a Knakkergaard-esque analysis and transcription are out of reach and impractical. For musicological purposes scholars and students such as Andre Mount,[13] Matthew Ferrandino,[14] Geoff Wills,[15] Nick Awde,[16] and a myriad of others contribute to

[11] Martin Knakkergaard, "Zappa and Modernism: An Extended Study of 'Brown Shoes Don't Make It" in *Frank Zappa and the And,* edited by Paul Carr (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), 172.
[12] Ibid., 167.
[13] Andre Mont, "*Bridging the Gap": Frank Zappa and the Confluence of Art and Pop* (Santa Barbara, CA.: University of California, Santa Barbara, 2010).
[14] Matthew Ferrandino, "What To Listen For In Zappa: Philosophy, Allusion, and Structure in Frank Zappa's Music" Master's Thesis, (University of Oregon, 2015).
[15] Geoff Wills, *Zappa And Jazz: Did it Really Smell Funny, Frank?* (Kibworth, UK.: Troubadour Publishing, 2015).
[16] Nick Awde, "Zappa and Satire: From Conceptual Absurdism to Perversity of Politics" from *Frank Zappa and the And* edited by Paul Carr, (Burlington, VT.: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), 92 – 96.

the body of Zappalogical literature through means of contextualization, analysis of trends (e.g., the treatment of humor throughout his career), and overarching stylistic investigation. In this study, observing Zappa's interactions with doo-wop, his bandmates, and the context surrounding the *Cruising* is of seminal importance, as in-depth transpositions and chordal analyses would prove extraneous.

Zappa's autobiography, *The Real Frank Zappa Book* (1989) is a helpful starting place in understanding his personal origins, as the book set the stage for nearly all Zappological literature to follow. In the book he provides intimate details of his life, commentary on his compositions, personal anecdotes, and philosophies about music, academia, and society. Although *The Real Frank Zappa Book* is an invaluable resource from the composer, it is not always easy to differentiate the facts from tongue-in-cheek statements. He only briefly mentions his compositional ideas and methods of *Cruising* in this book, and then shows conflicting attitudes regarding the doo-wop genre he held dear. In one instance, he refers to some of the lyrics of the record as "**sub-mongoloid** [all emphasis his]"[17] In the brief passages dedicated to *Cruising* he shares sentiments of disdain and admiration. Even outside of this record, Zappa disliked most lyrics, and much preferred pure, instrumental music; however, he saw *Cruising* as an opportunity to show the ridiculousness of "**bad mental health**"[18] love lyrics and lazily standardized chord progressions, and then improve upon them. Despite some of Zappa's inconsistencies which I will later explore in this thesis, his autobiography is an invaluable commentary about his world and music.

[17] Frank Zappa, *The Real Frank Zappa Book* (New York, NY: Poseidon Press), 89.
[18] Ibid., 90.

Zappa's autobiography, however, has reliability issues which others have addressed. *Zappa and Jazz: Did it Really Smell Funny, Frank* (2015) by Zappologist and music psychologist, Geoff Wills, tackles the reliability of Zappa in *The Real Frank Zappa Book* and his interviews. The title of Wills's book comes from a comment Zappa made on his 1973 live album, *Roxy and Elsewhere,* where he famously said, "Jazz is not dead . . . it just smells funny." Wills elaborates that Zappa's autobiography is also not forgiving of jazz, as he called it "the music of unemployment"[19] and later referred to standard Tin Pan Alley and jazz chord progressions, [II – V – I] specifically, as "**hateful practices**"[20] In this short span of pages, Zappa admonishes lazy musical standardization, uneducated and uncultured consumers, and a "diseased" music academia. Wills' goal of *Zappa and Jazz* is well-intentioned, if not slightly pedantic. His efforts stem from the idea that we should not take Zappa's interviews and writings at face value. Looking through Zappa's repertory and listening to many of his songs, shows that he did not truly have anything against jazz, Zappa simply did not care for some of its musical and financial practices. As a rebuttal to Zappa's snide comments, Wills painstakingly makes note of every jazz musician that Zappa worked with during his career, how he incorporated jazz into live shows, and how he occasionally mingled with ideas and people who he seemed to dislike. Although the majority of *Zappa and Jazz* is irrelevant to *Cruising,* its underlying gist remains crucial to this thesis and other Zappalogical literature: Zappa toes the line of being an unreliable source and narrator.

[19] Ibid., 106.
[20] Ibid., 189.

While *Zappa and Jazz* addresses one stylistic facet of Zappa's career and style, many other authors, such as Kelly Fisher Lowe, attempt to summarize his life and major works in a singular text. Lowe's 2006 book, *The Words and Music* of Frank Zappa adds little to the existing body of Zappalogical literature but is central to this thesis. Although I agree with him that Zappa and his music is worthy of study, his approach seems to come from a fan's perspective, rather than that of a scholar. In the introductory chapter, he remarks that "Sometime in the future . . . it is *more than likely*, that Zappa will be considered one of the Twentieth Century's most important composers [emphasis mine]."[21] What makes him so certain of this? Who, exactly will consider Zappa one of the Twentieth Century's most important composers? Does Zappa hold precedence over Schoenberg or Debussy? In a traditional collegiate music history sequence, one could perhaps teach Zappa alongside Varèse or George Rochberg,[22] but Lowe never substantiates his claim in a meaningful way, nor does he elaborate on why Zappa is an important Twentieth-Century art music composer. Zappa's social commentary and unique career make him a fascinating figure, but these aforementioned factors, among many others, will not likely propel him into the position of one of the Twentieth Century's greatest composers.

Alongside Lowe's questionable stance on Zappa's place within the Twentieth-Century canon, his chapter on *Cruising* is misleading. For example, several times he refers to various songs as "concert favorites," but Zappa never performed a single doo-wop track from *Cruising* live.[23] Lowe does a good job of providing brief information

[21] Kelly Fischer Lowe, *The Words and Music of Frank Zappa* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), xiii.
[22] I will further explore the correlation to Rochberg in Chapter Three.
[23] Charles Ulrich, *The Big Note: A Guide to the Recorded Works of Frank Zappa* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 2018), 112-116.

about quotations found in the various songs and making scant comparative notes between the *Freak Out!* songs and their contorted doo-wop counterparts; however, much of his analysis falls under a common idea: "[this song] has fascinating harmonies and quotations,"[24] with no further commentary.

Despite dodgy, repetitive, or extraneous writings in the body of literature, there are three books about Zappa that are invaluable to this study. Authors have written a wealth of books on Zappa and his life, but these books often contain the same information with minor changes.[25] In contrast, Charles Ulrich's exhaustive 2018 book, *The Big Note: A Guide to the Recorded Works of Frank Zappa* is perhaps the most comprehensive writing on Zappa to date. Ulrich cataloged ninety-seven of Zappa's recorded works, including his studio, single-live, multi-volume, and live-compilation records.[26] Ulrich arranged the book alphabetically, rather than chronologically, and included, at least, several paragraphs in each chapter about one of the members of the band, one of Zappa's influences, etc. Ulrich seemed intent to avoid providing readers with a narrative, hence his alphabetical organization.

Throughout *The Big Note*, Ulrich avoids writing a bibliographic narrative and instead provides background contexts, interview snippets, light analytical music information, album art and liner note information, and insight into the songs' lyrics, who wrote them, and if Zappa performed them live. He states in his opening chapter that he

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[24] Ibid., 60.

[2525] Some of the numerous books which fall into this category include *The Electric Don Quixote* (1996) by Neil Slaven, *Mother! The Real Frank Zappa Story* (2003) by Michael Gray, *Zappa: A Biography* (2005) by Barry Miles, *No Commercial Potential: The Saga of Frank Zappa* (1996) by David Walley, among others.

[26]This specifically references the six volumes of *You can't do that on Stage Anymore*, which borrow from a variety of live shows. On these records Zappa seamlessly spliced the tracks together, giving the appearance that the record is of one performance. What I have titled as "single-live" records are from one single recorded show, e.g., *Saarbrücken 1978*.

intentionally does not provide analysis into the text of the songs, nor does he attempt to offer his opinions. Instead, he simply wants to allow Zappa to speak for himself, primarily through quotes pulled from an incredible number of interviews, and lastly, he provides the reader with as much information on each record, song, and record artwork as possible.[27]

While not as densely detailed as *The Big Note*, the second book which I consider a definitive piece of Zappalogical literature is Kevin Courrier's *Dangerous Kitchen: The Subversive World of Frank Zappa* (2002). Although *Dangerous Kitchen* does fall under the biobibliographical heading, Courrier has researched his topic thoroughly and provides an excellent of commentary and background information, all seamlessly integrated into the historiography. The cover of the book is a collage of Zappa, some of his influences, and various Zappan iconography. The people on the cover are Zappa, Stravinsky, Ives, Varèse, The Cadillacs, and others. In this visual depiction of Zappa's world, the image of The Cadillacs elevates doo-wop as a key element of his style, thus having similar importance to Stravinsky and Varèse.

Finally, the seminal piece of Zappological literature is Ben Watson's 1997 book, *Frank Zappa's Negative Dialectic of Poodle Play.* The contents of this book are primarily biobibliographical, as are many books about Zappa, but unlike Courrier, Lowe, Wills, and others, Watson engages with a wide body of texts and philosophies outside of Zappa studies. He makes an incredible effort to frame Zappa's works within the contexts and philosophies of Theodor Adorno, Karl Marx, and several musicologists. *Negative*

[27] Ulrich, *The Big Note,* xx.

Dialectic is a seminal piece of Zappalogical literature that offers unique interpretations of the music not found elsewhere. Watson was the first major author to examine Zappa's career and music through the lens of contemporary philosophy and musicology, rather than plainly stating the biographical details as done in many other books. While he borrows from an array of scholarly texts, Watson's book is not wholly scholarly, journalistic, or biographical – as it is a mishmash of each.

Watson's attention to detail and his dedication to providing background information is of great importance. For example, in his discussion of *We're only in it for the Money* (1968), Watson devotes much of the chapter to an analysis of Franz Kafka's *In the Penal Colony.*[28] Although seemingly an aside, he calls attention to Zappa's liner notes, which state that the listener should read the short story. Through a lyrical, technical, and comparative analysis, Watson provides extra-musical commentary on the record which other authors had not yet documented.

[28] Ben Watson, *The Negative Dialectics of Poodle Play,* (New York, NY.: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 112-117.

Remaining Chapter Organization

I have divided the remainder of this thesis into four additional chapters, as well as my concluding remarks. The organization of these chapters is as follows:

Chapter Two -- Close Harmonies on a Collision Course: A Revised History of Cruising and its Place within the Project/Object

There is yet to be an agreement between Zappologists regarding *what* Zappa's philosophical aims were regarding *Cruising*, nor on the record's creation process. In Lowe's *Cruising* chapter of *The Words and Music of Frank Zappa*, he provides misleading information. Regarding the record's conception, he quotes Richard Kunc, the audio engineer of *Cruising* and *Uncle Meat*. Kunc recounts that between recording sessions for *Uncle Meat*, Zappa and The Mothers had an impromptu doo-wop jam session, which resulted in Zappa's proposal for an entire record in that style. He notes that Zappa returned the following day, having drawn up the charts for each song. I take little issue with Kunc, and have no reason to believe that he is speaking untruthfully; however, this quote does not fall in line with Ulrich's more detailed account of the record's purpose and origins, given in *The Big Note,* or with the quotes which Lowe draws on immediately after.

Lowe follows Kunc's quote up by giving some additional, but conflicting information regarding the record's conception and aim. Michael Gary notes that Zappa's intent for *Cruising* was to "combine . . . fragments from a whole wealth of genuine fifties r' n' b' numbers, and mixing them up with Fragments of Stravinsky,"[29] and also to

[29] Michael Gray, *Mother! The Frank Zappa Story* (London: Plexus, 1993), 110.

"educate late-sixties audiences where music had been."[30] While these distinctions are correct and align with Zappa's overarching philosophical ideas, they bring Kunc's reliability into question. Furthermore, in the evaluation of Kunc's quote and Lowe's claims, *Cruising* was the result of Zappa's longstanding fascination with doo-wop and the utilization of the backgrounds of his bandmates. If the record served as a form of Zappan education and cultural criticism, Kunc's claim that the record was a simply overnight outgrowth of a jam-session falls flat.

This chapter serves as a corrected account into why this record exists and the steps Zappa took to ensure its creation. While a spur-of-the-moment jam session may have been the catalyst for the record, *Cruising* was ultimately the result of Zappa's desire to utilize his musicians for their abilities and their shared love of doo-wop. Chapter 2 focuses heavily on the formation of The Mothers, Zappa's time in Studio Z, and his dictatorial management style while piecing together the events leading up to and following the record's 1968 release.

Chapter Three – Doo-Wop in the annus horibilis: Understanding Cruising within 1960s American Art Music Trends

Throughout his career Zappa claimed to be a serious composer who made serious music, citing that a song as simplistic as "Valley Girl" is no less serious than his ballet *Mo 'n Herb's Vacation.*[31] In his autobiography it becomes clear (if not already) that

[30] Kelly Fisher Lowe, *The Words and Music of Frank Zappa* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 59.
[31] "Frank Zappa and The London Symphony Orchestra (Rehearsal)," Youtube.com (Climbing up the Sounds, June 15, 2017), Frank Zappa and The London Symphony Orchestra (Rehearsal).

Zappa was well-acquainted with the music of Stravinsky, Varèse, Boulez, Berg, Ives, et. al., and modeled his music accordingly, whether through stylistic imitation or quotation, often the latter. In his autobiographical discussion of *Cruising* Zappa elaborated that Stravinsky's neoclassicism was the inspiration of the record. He writes, "I conceived that album along the same lines as the compositions in Stravinsky's neoclassical period. If he could take the forms and clichés of the classical era and pervert **them**, why not do the same with the rules and regulations that applied to doo-wop in the fifties?"[32] Although his attempt at neoclassicism does not quite fall within the term's standard definition, it lends credence to his assertion that all of his music is serious, regardless of the silly lyrics. More importantly, Zappa's retrograde from culturally relevant art-rock to extraneous doo-wop closely resembles the philosophy surrounding American post-modernity of the 1960s.

Chapter Four -- Romantic Tools of Destruction: Zappa's Continued Diatribe against Love

In 1968 Zappa diverted his attention from overt political criticism to social criticism. Unenthused with the ineffectiveness of the hippy movement he released *We're only in it for the Money*, a bold reaction to the notion that love heals all. Throughout the record he performs in a similar style to that of The Byrds and The Beatles but tinged with the same sarcasm found on *Cruising*. The damning, on-the-nose lyrics both isolated and intrigued consumers, and despite positive reviews and good sales numbers, some viewed the record as an overly sarcastic novelty.[33]

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[32] Zappa, *Real Book*, 88.
[33] Steve Huey, "Steve Huey: Biography & History," AllMusic, accessed March 10, 2020, https://www.allmusic.com/artist/steve-huey-mn0002165398).

Cruising was a continued tirade against the institution of "love." Throughout the record he intentionally maximizes the cheesy and over-the-top love lyrics of doo-wop, citing that they are a contributor of "bad-mental-health" for youths who do not know better.[34] The record includes a range of romanticized lyrics akin to those from the original style, but exaggerates them greatly. This chapter aims to identify Zappa's lyrical philosophy of the record and why he chose to use doo-wop as his vehicle to convey his message.

[34] Zappa, *Real Book*, 88.

Chapter Two: Close Harmonies on a Collision Course: A Revised History of *Cruising* and its Place within the Project/Object

In his book *The Words and Music of Frank Zappa,* Kelly Fischer Lowe dedicates a brief chapter to *Cruising*. As I have noted in my literature review, however, his comments and references do not paint the full picture regarding the conception and purpose of the record. The particularly misleading quote in question comes from *Cruising's* audio engineer, Richard Kunc. He recounts:

> During a break at a session for some other album, we were sitting around talking about old high school days and doo-wop tunes. Ray Collins and some other people just started singing them. Then someone sat down at the piano, someone else played drums, and so forth. All of a sudden Frank said, "Hey, let's make an album of this stuff!" Right then and there *Cruising with Ruben and the Jets* was born. He [Frank] came in the next day with charts for the whole album.[35]

Lowe follows the quote by giving some additional, but conflicting information. He continues to cite other quotations regarding the record's conception and philosophy such as the one from Michael Gray, writing that the intent for *Cruising* was to "combine . . .

[35] Billy James, *Necessity is -: The Early Years of Frank Zappa & The Mothers of Invention* (Middlesex, NJ: SAF Publishing, Ltd., 2001), 86.

fragments from a whole wealth of genuine fifties r' n' b' numbers, and mixing them up with fragments of Stravinsky,"[36] and also to "educate late-sixties audiences where music had been."[37]

If Zappa had a deep philosophical idea behind the record or if he truly wanted to challenge his audiences, I doubt he could write the charts for and conceive an entire record overnight. While the inspiration for the record could have initially stemmed from an impromptu jam session, *Cruising* was not unprecedented or anomalous in Zappa's repertory, even when comparing it to earlier records by The Mothers, such as *Freak Out!, We're only in it for the Money* and *Lumpy Gravy.*

As opposed to the result of a jam session, this record was a product of a band who had extensive background with doo-wop led by a taskmaster who allegedly had over six-hundred doo-wop and R&B records in his collection.[38] Consequently, Zappa turned his satirical lens from the government, societal trends, and the hippy movement, to the music traditions which united the band. This chapter explores the context and implications of *Cruising*'s usage of doo-wop while correcting Lowe's mischaracterizations. Opposed to Lowe's mischaracterization of the record's origins, I contend that *Cruising* is an excellent representation of Zappa's musical background, and that it has an important role within what he will call the Project/Object.

Zappa in Charge

[36] Michael Gray, *Mother! The Frank Zappa Story* (London: Plexus, 1993), 110.
[37] Kelly Fisher Lowe, *The Words and Music of Frank Zappa* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 59.
[38] Courrier, *Dangerous Kitchen,* 32.

From the early days of The Mothers to Zappa's final record, he concerned himself with a personal musical continuity which he titled Project/Object (henceforth referred to as P/O). The goal of P/O was to create a musical universe to thematically house his entire career, whether it be lyrical or musical themes, interviews, album art, etc. Cameron Piko, who has put forth an extraordinary effort into finding and connecting the recurring themes and ideas throughout Zappa's life, explained, "[If] you are to buy any Frank Zappa album at random, chances are you are falling into a minefield of cryptic self-referential lyrics from other albums, odd themes that only reveal their importance in future works, or even pieces of music that originated from a work 20 years earlier."[39] As illustrated in the analysis of Piko and others, regardless of the armies of musicians who Zappa worked with during his career, the consistency of the P/O makes it evident that Zappa was the primary thinktank behind the music and its varied messages.

In the first of Piko's two "conceptual continuity graphs," he constructed an intricate web of songs, records, or ideas found throughout Zappa's career, and all of the locations in which you can find each reference. Although not all of Piko's connections are perfect, the compressed, unreadable graph below is important, as it visually shows the sheer scale of the P/O.[40] Piko explains that "purple nodes indicate points of continuity, such as recurring lyrics, themes (poodles, leather, etc.) or important extramusical

[39] Cameron Piko, "The Crux of the Biscuit: Aural Conceptual Continuity in the Music of Frank Zappa," https://piko.com.au/in-disciplined/?p=315.

[40] I have not extensively checked each point of interest on the graph, but the points of continuity for *Cruising* are somewhat problematic. He identifies "Fountain of Love" (as it connects to Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, and thus connects to a wider body of Zappa's music), "Jelly Roll Gumdrop" (as it connects to Chuck Higgins's "Pachucko Hop" and thus Zappa's "Debra Kedabra"), and "Later that Night," as the song lyrics reference dogs: a recurring theme throughout the P/O. While these three points of continuity have merit, surprisingly, Piko failed to make note of the four songs from *Cruising* that are doo-wop reprisals of their *Freak Out!* counterparts, meaning that at *minimum*, there should be four more connections for the record. Regardless of the oversight, Piko's analysis is a valuable visual aid.

quotations (e.g., 'Louie Louie,' Stravinsky, [and] Bowie's 'Let's Dance'), pink nodes indicate albums, and blue nodes indicate songs."[41] To give a further example, if one searches the graph for "Stravinsky" the graph would highlight twelve nodes representing different songs which quote or refer to the composer.

[41] Piko, "The Crux."

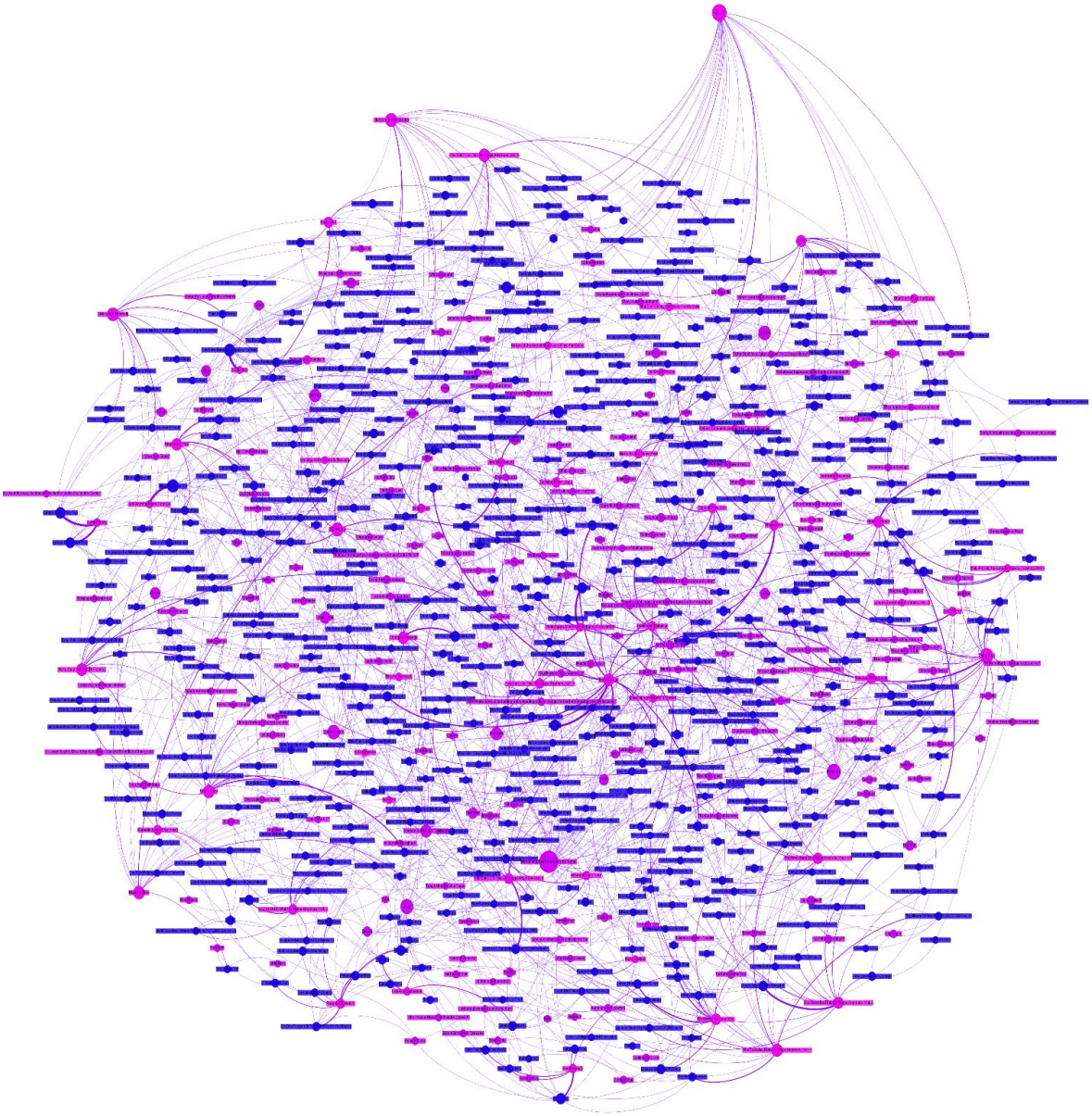

Figure 1.: Cameron Piko's first "conceptual continuity" graph

As indicated, the P/O is the final output of Zappa's thirty-year career, and through those years, he was *always* aware of the continuity. In his autobiography he writes:

> You may find a little POODLE over here, a little BLOW JOB over there etc., etc., etc. I am not obsessed by POODLES **or** BLOW JOBS, however; these words (and others of equal insignificance), along with pictorial images and melodic themes, recur throughout the albums, interviews, films, videos (and this book) for no other reason than to unify the "collection."[42]

Zappa's consistent focus on the P/O not only helps to unify the music, but it gives fans and scholars points of artistic interest.

Within the P/O there are few instances in which Zappa allowed his collaborators to provide musical authorship without his collaboration.[43] Throughout Zappa's career, whether regarding music from The Mothers or from the large touring ensembles of the 1970s and 80s, we often credit Zappa as the sole composer of the music. Despite working with many other musicians through the decades, he kept close tabs over the music recorded in the studio or played on tour. While he did not place an outright ban on his subordinates lyricizing or writing music, his primary goal was to fulfill his own artistic vision, rather than the visions of others. Talented performers such as Ray Collins and Roy Estrada of The Mothers, and (the later musicians) George Duke and Ruth Underwood

[42] Frank Zappa, *The Real Frank Zappa Book* (New York, NY: Poseidon Press, 1989), 140.
[43] One excellent non-*Cruising* example of Zappa's authorial supervision comes with the conception of the controversial song, "Magdalena," appearing on the live records *Live at Carnegie Hall* (1971) and *Just another Band from LA* (1972). Singer Howard Kaylan recounts scribbling down the incestuous lyrics and showing them to Zappa, asking if they were "way too sick" (Ulrich, 263). While Zappa gave his seal of approval, there are subtle Zappa-isms throughout, such as references to The Penguins and the protagonist's similar shared perversity with the government figure in "Brown Shoes." Undoubtedly, Zappa built from Kaylan's lyrical sketch to create something of his own.

simply exist as Zappa's auxiliary musicians, rather than independent thinkers and artists.[44]

Although serious artistic input from his collaborators was generally out of the question, Zappa eventually evolved into an expert bandleader who pushed his musicians according to their own personal capabilities. This skill, however, did not happen overnight. *Cruising* was perhaps his first serious attempt to gear his compositions towards his individuals. In The Mothers' prior records and Zappa's earlier dabbling in film and orchestral music, his focus seemed to be more clearly set on establishing the band and music. Their second record, *Absolutely Free*, was a natural development of the musical ideas laid out in *Freak Out!* In these early years he tested the limits of what was possible. By 1968 he had not only worked and recorded enough with his band to understand those limits, but he was also a gradually maturing composer and artist. Percussionist, Ruth Underwood later recounted that Zappa's ability to write for his ensembles was one of his greatest strengths, but in 1968 it is clear that these abilities were not yet fully developed.[45]

Because of the P/O Zappa took on the role of the lead composer and administrator, while referring to his collaborators as "vehicles." While discussing The Mothers' original vocalist and founding member, Ray Collins, he says:

> If you're a composer, you need a vehicle to bring your music to life. If you write for instruments, you need somebody who can play it, and if you write vocals you need somebody who can sing it. It's fortunate that I had

[44] Zappa coined the term "auxiliary musician" in the liner notes of *Freak Out!* "The Mothers Auxiliary" was a huge troupe of over twenty studio musicians which played various instruments such as the cello, trumpet, French horn, etc., during the numerous 1966 recording sessions. One could argue that from the beginning, Zappa visualized making music with a varied, large-scale ensemble such as the original auxiliary combined with The Mothers (Ulrich, 165).
[45] Ruth Underwood, interviewed on *Classic Albums: Apostrophe/Over-nite Sensation,* 2007.

> Ray Collins because if I hadn't met him, I wouldn't have had any way to move into that kind of songwriting.[46]

This description does not read as if he saw Collins as a friend, equal, or even as a free-thinking artist. Zappa instead plainly states that those who work with him are auxiliary musicians who help bring his artistic message and vision to life. Stated more succinctly, Zappa's endeavors are part of the larger P/O. His oeuvre has no room for serious artistic input from Collins, Underwood, Duke, or any other musician, as it would cheapen *his* career's continuity goals. Zappa *must* have control over the entirety of the art without compromising his vision.

Because of Zappa's ambition and dedication to perfection, each ensemble he performed in served as a testament to his career. Therefore, he kept a tight lock on what the band played, how they played it, how they rehearsed, how often they rehearsed, and, in the early days, how long their hair was.[47] Although a devout believer in personal freedom, the word autocratic best describes his management style. Eric Bourdon, lead singer of The Animals, compared recording two songs with him as "like working for Hitler."[48] With the large ensembles of his late career, his strict management became a necessity, to keep his workers drug-free and hopefully jail-free and to keep the nightly music quality as high as possible.

Zappa's dictatorial behavior began, at the latest, during his time with the original Mothers, and the chronology of *how* he became the de facto band leader is a major point of interest in the context of *Cruising* and the disbanding of the original group. In the early 1960s, prior to the "formation" of The Mothers, Zappa worked an assortment of odd-jobs

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[46] Frank Zappa, interviewed by J.P. Cantillon, "The Broadcast Industry Is a Big Disappointment," *Sh-Boom,* March 1990, https://www.afka.net/Articles/1990-03_Sh-Boom.htm.
[47] Jimmy Carl Black, 2008 interview. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4s0Hhc7pG8.
[48] Courrier, *Dangerous Kitchen*, 100.

while playing in various lounge bands and R&B groups.[49] Formed in 1956, the racially integrated Blackouts consisted of Zappa, Wayne Lyles, Johnny and Carter Franklin, Fred and Wally Salazar, and, unofficially, James Sherwood. The diverse, multi-racial group played covers of classic R&B songs from Little Richard and Wilbert Harrison, and after a year-and-a-half, they disbanded.[50] At this point, Zappa had not yet begun playing guitar, and the raucous R&B band seemed to be no more than a fun high-school endeavor with only a few serious gigs. According to his autobiography, Zappa claims to have only organized one show for the band. Despite opening for Louis Armstrong and Earl Bostic in 1958, his book reflects little fervor for his time with the group, and it did not seem to be a serious musical endeavor.

In 1965 after his short stint in the San Bernadino County Jail, Zappa received a phone call from Ray Collins, the new singer of The Soul Giants, the R&B group which would later become The Mothers of Invention. After a series of disagreements and problems with Ray Hunt, the band's original guitarist, Collins gave his musical acquaintance and fellow doo-wop fan, Frank Zappa, a call to fill the vacancy. During junior high school in Pomona, California, Collins joined the choir and began singing Nat King Cole, Irving Berlin, and Rodgers & Hart at school assemblies. The band consisted of Jimmy Carl Black (drums), Roy Estrada (bass), Davy Coronado (saxophone), and Zappa, who would immediately usurp the title of band leader from Collins.[51]

Zappa approached the group with promises of commercial potential. Collins and Black recall his proposition, "If you will play **my** music, I will make you rich and famous

[49] Zappa, *Real Book*, 41.
[50] Courrier, *Dangerous Kitchen,* 46-47.
[51] David Allen, "Please Greet Ray Collins, Claremont's Own Mother," Daily Bulletin (Daily Bulletin, May 8, 2015), https://www.dailybulletin.com/2015/05/08/please-greet-ray-collins-claremonts-own-mother/).

[emphasis mine]."[52] The money did not come, however, and within months The Soul Giants became The Mothers and Zappa forced a relocation from Pomona to Hollywood, in search of a record deal.[53] The Soul Giants were no longer a local pop/doo-wop band; with Zappa's entrance they were a collection of R&B musicians who now played satirical art-rock and put on absurdist theatrical performances at their live shows.[54] Following the relocation and shift of musical focus, Collins approached the music and his position in the band with ambivalence and seeming indifference, citing that under Zappa, the "beautiful music" he grew up with fell by the wayside, and to make matters worse, "making fun of things" was now at the forefront.[55]

Considering the unfulfilled promise of money, the relocation, and drastic stylistic changes, animosity between the original Soul Giants and Zappa ensued. Collins's departure became a running joke, and as The Mothers gained notoriety, Zappa pushed him and the other members to the side.[56] Collins discussed in an interview:

> Even on the first album, *Freak Out!*, in the original liner notes, Frank tells about how he and I always disagreed on the content of the album. It started at the beginning of our association. When we'd go like, on *The Steve Allen Show*, I'd say, "I want to get out there and sit down and talk to Steve too.' I was always kept in the background."[57]

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[52] Ibid.

[53] In a 2008 interview, Jimmy Carl Black notes that Zappa changed the name several times. The Soul Giants became The Blackouts, Captain Glasspack & His Magic Mufflers, and eventually the group agreed upon The Muthers (Muthers being the band's original spelling) which would eventually change to The Mothers of Invention (Black, 2008) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8J18yJ9WtPk.

[54] I would like to add a point of clarity regarding the backgrounds of Collins vs. Zappa. Per a 1990 interview, Collins cites that he "was raised on pop music by 4 Freshman, Frankie Laine, Frank Sinatra, and Jesse Belvin. [He] had recorded with The Tigers and performed at El Monte with Johnny Otis' band and Chuck Higgins' band. Frank's influence was real blues, like Muddy Waters" (Collins, 1990). https://www.afka.net/Articles/1990-03_Sh-Boom_1.htm.

[55] Allen David, "Meet the New Greeter."

[56] Ibid.

[57] Steve Propes, "Ray Collins: Zappa's Mouthpiece," 1990-03 Ray Collins: Zappa's Mouthpiece, accessed March 3, 2020, https://www.afka.net/Articles/1990-03_Sh-Boom_1.htm).

As time passed, it was increasingly obvious that Zappa was not only The Mothers' boss, but he was the sole creative force behind the music. Collins and the other members *were not* equals to Zappa; they functioned as the *vehicle* to convey his art.

When *Cruising* released in 1968, clear hostility existed between the boss, and his subordinates, and Collins functioned as the glue that held the band together. Percussionist Art Tripp recounts:

> Ray, to me, was the Mothers. . . The real heart of the band, I think was Ray, and I just loved the guy. . . I remember when he quit it just killed me. . . But Ray is kind of a vagabond. He just kind of moved around at will whenever he wanted to go and he was kind of a modern-day cowboy. He liked to sing fifties-type rock and roll, you know, prettier, more down-to earth music and he never really liked some of the far-out music . . . he had a great golden voice, but some of the stuff in the odd time signatures and some of the other stuff – he just didn't like it. He had a great sense of humor. Just a riot. So he was very active in the stage shows, singing and doing weird stuff – a great sense of the odd.[58]

Following Collins's departure, Zappa took the band on a tumultuous and poorly planned European tour, in which the boss and his subordinates informally drew lines in the sand against each other, and arguments between bandmates alongside the formation of micro-factions ensued.[59] While Collins, alone, was not the sole cause for the breakup, Zappa's disregard of his colleagues during the process of recording *Cruising* moved the "running joke" antagonism to blatant hostility, predicating the difficult times ahead.

Following Collins's initial absence, The Mothers grew from the small unit, originally the Soul Giants, into an ensemble which resembled the later large Zappa auxiliaries. The Mothers survived its European tour and proceeded to quickly record two additional records before disbanding: *Burnt Weeny Sandwich* (1970) and *Weasels Ripped*

[58] Ulrich, *The Big Note*, 111.
[59] Courrier, *Dangerous Kitchen*, 172 – 175.

my Flesh (1970), with Collins returning to sing two songs on the latter. By this time, Zappa had a whopping twelve musicians on the payroll and lukewarm receptions of three of the last four records. So, keeping the band together was a financial impossibility.[60] In his lite autobiography Bunk Gardner recounts Zappa's demanding rehearsals and lack of wherewithal:

> I remember being [at the studio] for sixteen hours and Frank would never give up. I got to a point where I stopped counting the hours recording *Uncle Meat* and *Ruben & The Jets*… Frank always circumvented the union, as far as paying our wages, it was always whatever he decided, it was a little disturbing, but let's not go there.[61]

Despite the strenuous life as one of Zappa's employees, it was clear that by this point, those who remained in the group had accepted their musical reality. Gardner discusses the formal dissolution of the band recalling that Zappa called The Mothers in for a meeting about finances. "[He announced] 'We've lost money this past year, and the band owes me $20,000.' We thought that we had come to divide up all of this money that we had been making… Frank said, 'you know what, I'm gonna call it even.' … and that was the last meeting at Frank's house which kind of left of speechless and not really knowing what the fuck happened."[62]

Gardner, Collins, and other musicians undoubtedly felt blindsided or mistreated throughout their tenure with Zappa in the early days of The Mothers. In *The Big Note*,

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[60] Between 1968 and 1970 The Mothers released five records: *We're only in it for the Money*, *Cruising, Uncle Meat, Mothermania, Burnt Weeny Sandwich,* and *Weasels Ripped my Flesh.* Out of these releases, the only two which broke the top 100 billboard charts were *We're only in it for the Money* (30) and *Uncle Meat* (43).

[61] Bunk Gardner, "Absolutely Free / Don Ellis / Apostolic Studios / Ruben & The Jets / Uncle Meat / Son of Mr. Green Genes," from *The Bunk Gardner Story: Part 2*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NauFNWd134

[62] Ibid.

Ulrich concisely summarizes the fluctuation of Zappa's employees during this short, tumultuous period:

> The Mothers toured the U.S. from late October 1967 through mid-September 1968. Ray Collins left and returned, as did Don Preston. Billy Mundi left in January 1968, and Art Tripp (drums) replaced him in February. Ray Collins left in August 1968. The Mothers toured Europe from late September through late October 1968. At this time the Mothers consisted of Jimmy Carl Black (drums, vocals), Roy Estrada (bass, vocals), Bunk Gardner (tenor sax), Don Preston (keyboards), Motorhead Sherwood (baritone sax), Art Tripp (drums), Ian Underwood (alto sax), and FZ (guitar, vocals). After 1971, Buzz (trumpet, 1970) and Bunk Gardner never worked with Zappa again. Needless to say, he had a very high turnover rate from 1968 – 1971. Original members such as Roy Estrada and Jimmy Carl Black would return and then leave, then return again.[63]

The original iteration of The Mothers was destined to fail considering the high turnover rate, tensions between Zappa and Collins, extreme rehearsal and recording schedules, cramped living conditions, and a suspicious lack of pay. Between *Cruising* (1968) and *Weasels* (1970) what started as a doo-wop and R&B cover band turned into a totalitarian regime.

Early Doo-Wop at Studio Z

While discussing the many stylistic threads of the P/O, Rolf Mauer wrote in *Times* that Zappa sought to recreate and intertwine an extremely diverse set of musical ideas, whether it be 1950s doo-wop, screaming guitar solos, or symphonic literature.[64] If considering the entire body of art, doo-wop only occupies a small space. The style, however, maintained relevance throughout Zappa's career, even as he moved from the satire-centric Mothers to his more mature solo endeavors, orchestral compositions, and

[63] Ulrich, *Big Note*, xxix - xxx.
[64] *New York Times,* August 19, 1999, 11.

live performances. The remainder of this chapter focuses on Zappa's interest in doo-wop impacted his total output, apart from *Cruising.*

Although recorded and released in 1968 the earliest origins of *Cruising* began in 1963 at Zappa's recently acquired Studio Z, formally Pal Studios, located in Ranchero Cucamonga. To celebrate his newest business venture, he threw an inaugural party, complete with sound recordings which he later edited and released on *Mystery Disk* (1985).[65] Zappa later recounted:

> At the party was Beefheart, a guy named Bob Narcisso, Ray Collins, Motorhead, Beefheart's little girlfriend Laurie, another guy who used to play drums in our band, Al Ceraeff. I think that was about it. It was the night I took possession of Studio Z, and we just went into the studio and turned on the tape recorded and so I've got tapes of Captain Beefheart singing 'Night Owl' and Ray Collins singing 'Louie Louie' and we'd get a background going and be fucking around and making up lyrics on top of that.[66]

"Louie Louie" was of course the topic of scorn and adoration for Zappa, musically appearing in fragments of several other songs such as "Plastic People" (*Absolutely Free*), "Part One" (*Lumpy Gravy*), in live performance, and written about throughout his autobiography. In one instance, Zappa went as far as firing a guitarist because she could not play the song.[67] From the onset of his career as a professional musician, doo-wop, blues, and rock were central to his musical life and surrounding atmosphere. Considering Zappa's career-long fixation with the tune, a recording of Beefheart singing it at Studio Z comes as no surprise. "Night Owl," on the other hand, is more ambiguous to the P/O and is a lesser-known song.

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[65] Courrier, *Dangerous Kitchen*, 65.
[66] Michael Gray, *Mother! Is the Story of Frank Zappa,* 32.
[67] Courrier, *Dangerous Kitchen*, 75.

Although many bands have recorded songs titled "Night Owl," Zappa could have only been referring to Tony Allen & The Champ's 1955 doo-wop hit -- a fairly standard West Coast doo-wop song. It prominently features the rolling piano triplets throughout, the bass guitar player, and "sha-doo-wopping" backing singers who provide a simple, non-intrusive vocal accompaniment to Allen's soulful singing. Courrier weighs in on Zappa's relationship to doo-wop while at Pal Studios and Studio Z:

> For Zappa, composing doo-wop music was closer to his field of interest than anything else he was writing and producing at Pal [Studios]. 'It's always been my contention that the music that was happening during the '50s has been one of the finest things that ever happened to American music, and I loved it. I could sit down and write a hundred more of the '50s-type songs right now and enjoy every minute of it.'[68]

"Night Owl" was Collins's preferred style, and Zappa had not yet thought to muddy the doo-wop formula.

Zappa's short time at Studio Z stands as an important point in his early career, because this was where he met and became friends with Collins, built movie sets, and did not yet have a band to help him push musical limits. *Mystery Disk* is one of the only source of extant recordings of Zappa's non-Mothers early rock ventures.[69] Alongside "Opening Night at Studio Z (Collage)," there are primordial versions of other songs, such as "Duke of Prunes" and "How Could I Be Such a Fool?," and "Plastic People," conceptual ideas for his potential rock-opera, *I was a Teenage Maltshop,* alongside his potential film *Captain Beefheart vs. the Grunt People.* After his 1963 arrest the police department raided Studio Z and confiscated "eighty hours of research tapes that [he had

[68] Ibid., 62.
[69] There were multiple releases of multiple *Mystery Disk* LPs that re-released on a single album in 1998. In my discussion of the album, I refer to the combined 1998 release, rather than discussing the two separate LPs.

been making] on sociological subjects since 1955."[70] In an instant, much of the work created and conceptualized in Studio Z vanished.

While at Studio Z in 1963 Zappa had no P/O or yet begun serious musical experimentation or satire. Instead, the early tracks on the *Mystery Disk* recordings are a testament to his musical origins. The thirty-five tracks fit nicely into four categories: recordings from Studio Z, early experimentalism, covers and authentic R&B homages, and sound recordings. A total of seven recordings came directly from Studio Z: "Opening Night at Studio Z (Collage)," "Theme from *I was a Teenage Maltshop*," "The Birth of Captain Beefheart," "Metal Man has Won his Wings," "Bossa Nova Pervertamento," and "Excerpt from the Uncle Frankie Show."[71] These Studio Z recordings found on *Mystery Disk*, alongside the Collins's commentary on his time at the studio is proof that not only does *Cruising* fit nicely into the P/O, but that it was the product of a gradual process of finding ways to "pervert" the genre.[72]

Zappa pokes fun at early rock & doo-wop verbally and musically in "Excerpt from the Uncle Frankie Show," and "Charva," criticizing the style before he had conceptualized the *Cruising*-styled variant. "He recorded 'Excerpt' at Studio Z … for a broadcast on KSPC-FM, Pomona College, Claremont, California. FZ demonstrates 'two chord progressions that were sub-moronic in musical content.' He plays them in the key of C on the piano."[73] "Charva," on the other hand, was in the "sub-moronic" 1950s West Coast doo-wop style, containing the repetitive piano triplets, vocabales, and teenage love

[70] Courrier, *Dangerous Kitchen*, 71.
[71] Ulrich, *Big Note,* 355-366.
[72] Zappa, *Real Book*, 88.
[73] Ulrich, *Big Note,* 361.

lyrics. Although he used regular doo-wop elements without too many satirical additions, the song was meant to be "sung by a very bad rock & roll group," with a lead vocalist who cannot sing in tune and a untalented backing band only capable of a few chords and rhythms.[74] The title, itself, is a joke, as *charva* is the Spanish word for an unruly teenager. According to Zappa, it is the unintelligent *charvas* who consume and perform "sub-moronic" and sloppily standardized music. Although the lyrics are romantic, societal critique underpins the song's purpose. "Charva" and "Excerpt" illustrate that while he did not entirely dislike the style, he was not willing accept the "beautiful music" at face value, as did Collins.

Conflicting Doo-Wop Ideas between Zappa and Collins

In addition to the doo-wop musings on *Mystery Disk*, two additional later recorded songs in the style originated in the studio: "Go Cry on Somebody Else's Shoulder" and "Anything." Although there are no known surviving recordings of either, Collins has spoken about the creation process of each, noting that "Go Cry" was improvised while thinking of his ex-wife, and "Anything," meant for his then-current girlfriend. On the initial release of *Freak Out!*, the original liner notes credit Collins with co-authorship of "Go Cry," but not in the later re-releases.[75] In Collins account of the composition process, he says that he came up with the lyrics, ad-libbed speaking, and harmony. The song fits perfectly into the style of *Cruising*, and the conflicting

[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., 114, 168.

contributions of Zappa and Collins predicates the eventual treatment of doo-wop in 1968 and beyond.[76]

With the later addition of the *Cruising*-isms, Zappa's satire and personal views ultimately trampled upon Collins's preferred style, clearly illustrating the tension between the two colleagues. Collins solely wrote "Anything," which Zappa later reworked for *Cruising* – a rare change of authorship. He recounts going to Studio Z to record a song for his girlfriend, and when Zappa chose to revive it for *Cruising* he was the one who titled it, called for the sax solo, and presumably added the patent, obnoxious "oohs and ahs."[77] Although the original pre-Mothers recording of "Anything" is lost, this was not a satirical or dirty Frank-Zappa-Love-Song, but a genuine take on simple, sentimental music.

Several years after Zappa's short stint in Ranchero Cucamonga, The Mothers released its first record, *Freak Out!* in 1966. Out of its fifteen tracks, the record included two pre-*Cruising* doo-wop songs and four rock songs which Zappa later reimagined on *Cruising*.[78] He could have released "Go Cry on Somebody Else's Shoulder" on *Cruising* easily, because it perfectly matches many of the aforementioned *Cruising*-isms, such as the drunken bass, obnoxious falsetto, cheesy love lyrics, and regular orchestration and rhythmic patterns. In his discussion of the song's lyrics, Matthew Ferrandino suggests that this song is an alteration of doo-wop's fairly repetitive lyrical treatment. The protagonist takes on the role of love's rejector, as opposed to the more common role of

[76] Zappa's contributions being the satirical elements, as compared to Collins's idea of an alternate, but genuine addition to the style.
[77] Ulrich, *Big Note,* 114.
[78] Zappa, *Real Book,* 76.

the crying "rejectee." Compared to staples such as "Earth Angel" and "Since I Don't Have You," "Go Cry" not only goes against the grain, but it is a more realistic and healthy take on romance.[79] This analysis fits nicely into Zappa's early philosophy of musical reeducation. Unlike the "sub-moronic" lyrics of "Charva," or the "truly moronic" text of "Fountain of Love," "Go Cry" renegotiates the boundaries of love and its mental health repercussions. The protagonist plainly states that he does not need his unfaithful partner, and she should leave him be and go cry to someone else. Played in Zappa's doo-wop style and with several textual allusions to the nostalgic 1950s, he situates an anti-romantic message in a romantically decorated package.

Doo-Wop without Collins

After *Cruising'*s 1968 release, Zappa arguably moved into the second period of his career. The music and satire were less "in-yer-face," and the P/O began to come into a clearer view. With records such as *Hot Rats* (1969) and *Chunga's Revenge* (1970) it was evident that Zappa wanted to gradually distance himself from The Mothers and compose without constraints, thus moving from a composer and bandleader in residence to a liberated artist. The post-*Cruising* records had a considerably heavier focus on instrumentals, featuring more solos from Zappa and fewer silly texts. The growing focus on instrumental music finally allowed him to fulfill his desires of writing interesting instrumental music without the societally forced necessity of vocals.[80]

Burnt Weeny Sandwich, the first Mothers record to follow *Cruising* and *Uncle Meat,* was a continuation of the Collins/Zappa strife and an experiment with instrumental

[79] Ferrandino, "What to Listen for in Zappa," 32-33.
[80] Zappa, *Real Book*, 185.

chamber music, rather than a continuation of art-rock. On this primarily instrumental record, Zappa includes two genuine, rather than satirical, covers of 1950s doo-wop and R&B songs. Without the oldies' singer with a golden voice and knack for beautiful music, Zappa had to make do with a small array of non-singers which consisted of himself, Roy Estrada, Janet Ferguson, and Lowell George. Although he brought in a total of nine new musicians to the growing ensemble, he did not hire a replacement vocalist to take Collins' place.

With Collins's absence, Zappa had room to experiment with what he referred to as "electric chamber music," bookended by two doo-wop covers: "WPLJ" originally by The Four Deuces, and "Valarie" by Jackie & The Starlites.[81] Although the chamber music was by no measure as strange as *Lumpy Gravy* (1967), his first studio bout into the realm of experimental orchestral music, it marked the end of The Mothers as a rock band and beginning of Zappa the independent artist. *BWS* strongly resembled the eventually standard Zappa format in which vocals and text falls by the wayside to favor instrumental music.[82]

In both covers Zappa does not include the obnoxious *Cruising*-isms or uses them sparely. Not only did he refrain from satire, but he altered "Valarie" in a constructive, rather than destructive way. The original recording includes a lengthy section of crying and pleading for the protagonist's lover to return, which Zappa omitted. Furthermore, he slowed the tempo while staying true to the original, including maintaining the original vocal harmonies and accompaniment patterns. Zappa's slower rendition allowed for the

[81] Frank Zappa, interviewed by Richard Williams, "The Mothers are Dead, But Zappa's Still Very Much Alive', *Melody Maker,* October 25, 1969, https://www.afka.net/Articles/1969-10_Melody_Maker.htm.
[82] Zappa, *Real Book*, 185.

clear and meaningful text transmission while giving the listener more time to hear the pleasant harmonies and expressive saxophone accompaniment. Considering Collins's background, these two songs were part of an unfulfilled wish to sing throughout his tenure with The Mothers. Zappa's inclusion of the two genuine covers bookending *BWS* come as punctuation to the prior strife.

Zappa later justified the inclusion of both doo-wop covers on his serious "electric chamber music" album, citing that "Valarie" was an attempt at being a hit single, while "WPLJ" was a fun song which aligned with his sardonic view of society.[83] At a 1969 concert he explained:

> It's a song about white port and lemon juice, which is what American teenage boys and girls used to get ripped on during the '50s. The song tells the tragic story of a person who actually likes the taste of white port and lemon juice. After you get tired of smoking dope and taking pills and shooting speed and, you know, mainlining and taking acid, and doing all the weird trippy things that you do in order to be an acceptable teenager, try drinking white port and lemon juice and see what it does to you. Obviously, it'll just make you throw up. No cosmic experience involved whatsoever.[84]

To Zappa, the two songs were acceptable, good songs worthy to be the bread in the burnt weeny sandwich, while the serious music was the meat. By leaving the character of both songs intact, we again see that although *Cruising* was not genuine doo-wop or R&B, he still revered the style. Keeping his reverence in mind, the question remains: why wait until Collins's departure to record authentic renditions of the style?

To Collins's expense, the answer came with The Mothers' next and final album, *Weasels Ripped My Flesh* (1970). When Collins returned that year, The Mothers had

[83] Ulrich, *Big Note*, 72.
[84] Frank Zappa, in concert, early show, Toronto Ontario, February 23, 1969.

become a chamber orchestra, rather than a rock band, indicating that Zappa was making enough money to fund the ensemble. With the expanded ensemble and their covers on *BWS*, Collins likely saw money and his preferred music in his future. In both cases, he was incorrect. Out of *WRmF*'s eleven tracks, only three had texted "regular" sounding vocals. Collins sings "Directly from my Heart," Zappa sings "My Guitar wants to Kill your Mama," and finally there is "Oh No," which was simply a reprisal of the principal theme of *Lumpy Gravy*, now with text. *WRmF* begins with "Didja get any Onya," which closely resembles free jazz. "Directly from my Heart to You," the second song on the record, more closely resembles the R&B styles of Muddy Waters and "the real blues" which Collins's was not intimate with.[85] Zappa had no intent to utilize Collins's background again, but gladly welcomed him back to sing new experimental music. "Oh No" was the last recording Collins made with Zappa, and unlike Black, Estrada, and several others, he never again returned to collaborate.

Following the disbanding of The Mothers in 1970, Zappa was slow to return to doo-wop, because he had lost Collins and Estrada, who sang the "high wheezings" on most of the tracks.[86] Estrada collaborated sporadically with Zappa until 1993 and occasionally sang in the old style, sans Collins. Zappa later commented on the degree of difficulty of singing in the style during a 1979 interview for *Musician* magazine. When asked "was it difficult to find musicians who can play in that style convincingly?" Zappa replied,

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[85] Ray Propes, "Ray Collins: Frank Zappa's Mouthpiece," https://www.afka.net/Articles/1990-03_Sh-Boom_1.htm.

[86] The liner notes of *Freak Out!, Cruising,* and *Uncle Meat* all give Estrada different credit titles for his falsetto: "boy soprano," "high wheezings," and "Pachuco Falsetto," respectively.

> Yes, it's very difficult to find vocalists who understand that technique anymore. The sort of stuff Roy [Estrada] and Ray [Collins] were doing – that's a lost art. That kind of falsetto stuff – there may be a few people left in the world who know how to do that. None of the younger singers know how to do that.[87]

Without Estrada and Collins, making *good* doo-wop, whether the satirical variant a la *Cruising* or the more authentic "Valarie," would become a challenge for the electronic chamber ensembles Zappa played with throughout the remainder of his career.

Even without his doo-wop vehicles, Zappa maintained the style's importance even when his band was neither playing or recording it. In his autobiography, he introduces his teenage discovery of Varèse's "Ionization" juxtaposed against "VERY WHITE TEEN" dancing music played by black doo-wop groups.[88] Throughout the book, he shows disdain for the style, yet there is also a sense of reverence and respect for it. George Duke, who played keyboards and was later the lead vocalist for Zappa's touring troupe in the 1970s, said in an interview that while Zappa was putting the band together, he would spend lengthy sections of rehearsal practicing doo-wop progressions and patterns. Duke questioned Zappa by saying that he "didn't study at the conservatory to play this";[89] however, despite Duke initially feeling that the doo-wop was beneath him, this repertoire expansion led to the beginning of Zappa opening Duke's mind to other musical possibilities.

Duke joined Zappa by playing the keyboard, and he did not have vocal training, but eventually went on to become the lead vocalist and could sing extraordinarily complex and difficult songs such as "Inca Roads." Here, Zappa does not use doo-wop for

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[87] Dan Forte, "Zappa" in *Musician,* August 1979. https://www.afka.net/Articles/1979-08_Musician.htm.
[88] Zappa, *Real Book*, 30.
[89] "George Duke on Frank Zappa," (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERFUbX648S4).

the same reason bands traditionally play it for the white, dancing teenagers; Zappa uses it as a tool to express creativity in what he saw as formulaic and thus uncreative medium. Even within the standardized and "idiotic" doo-wop discourse, there are ways to find creativity and express truly musical and novel ideas. While it is not common to find quotations of *Rite of Spring* in a song as cheesy as his "Fountain of Love," Zappa seamlessly integrates the opening bassoon melody into nonchalant oohs and ahs during the fadeout.

The stylistic chronology presented in this chapter is of seminal importance in understanding Zappa's relationship with doo-wop and the history of *Cruising*. However, the doo-wop from Studio Z and the Zappa/Collins strife ignores the pertinent wider context of the tumult in the United States during the 1960s. Zappa's first two records, *Freak Out!* and *Absolutely Free* exist as artifacts from a counterculture hungry for change. In opening words of "Plastic People," the first track of *Absolutely Free*, we hear Zappa announce, "Ladies and gentlemen, may I present to you, the president of the United States … he's been sick," set to the "moronic" and out-of-tune accompaniment of "Louie Louie."[90] Zappa had not shied away from social and political consciousness in his music, but in 1968 he stepped away from all political messages with the releases of *Lumpy Gravy*, *We're only in it for the Money, Uncle Meat,* and *Cruising*. This stylistic retrograde befuddled listener, making for a "dish nobody was wanting to consume."[91] The following chapter places *Cruising* and its impact, or lack thereof, within the context

[90] Frank Zappa, "Plastic People" from *Absolutely Free*, Verve, 1967.
[91] Courrier, *Dangerous Kitchen,* 154.

of the socio-political events of the 1960s, alongside the advent of American postmodernist art music.

Chapter Three: Doo-Wop in the *annus horribilis*
Understanding *Cruising* within 1960s American Art Music Trends

With songs originating in 1963 at Studio Z, on *Freak Out!*, and as originals for the record, Zappa and Collins either wrote or conceptualized *Cruising* between 1963 and 1968, five of the most tumultuous years of the decade. As a social commentator living in the United States through this period, narrowly missing the Vietnam draft, Zappa wrote music that was a lurid reflection of a sick society. Despite earlier calls to action as in "Trouble Every Day" and "Plastic People," his 1968 output *seemed* divorced from what was happening around him. Nowhere in *Cruising* (1968) or *Uncle Meat* (1969) does he allude to the shocking assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., or Robert F. Kennedy. Likewise, the "in-yer-face" satirist failed to acknowledge the violent police removal of the student demonstrators who occupied several buildings on the campus of Columbia University. Compared to the preceding on-the-nose messages found in *Freak Out!* and *Absolutely Free*, *Cruising,* anomalous as it is, stylistically stands outside of time, and seemingly ignores the events of 1968, the tumultuous year which Taruskin titles the "*annus horribilis*."[92] While a record of "greasy love songs" recorded in one of the nation's most tumultuous years of the Twentieth Century was irrelevant to the current strife, it is undeniable that Zappa's immediate surroundings and art-music trends either strongly influenced or applied to him, leading to *Cruising*.

In his autobiography's entry on *Cruising*, Zappa compares his change in styles to that of his hero, Igor Stravinsky. He writes, "I conceived that album along the same lines

[92] Richard Taruskin, "The Sixties," in *Music in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York, NY.: Oxford University Press, 2009), 310.

as the composition in Stravinsky's neoclassical period. If he could take the same forms and clichés of the classical era and pervert **them**, why not do the same with the rules and regulations that applied to doo-wop in the fifties?"[93] By the 1960s Stravinsky had long abandoned his neoclassical phase and was composing serial works such as *A Sermon, A Narrative, and a Prayer* (1961) and *The Flood* (1962). During this decade, however, American composer George Rochberg had controversially changed his musical affiliations from serialism to neoromanticism. In doing so, he spent the remainder of his career defending his new, anti-serial philosophies. Although Zappa did not face the intense and academic scrutiny of Rochberg, he did, however, see *Cruising* as a temporary stylistic shift from modernism to neoclassicism. While Zappa never made mention of Rochberg and his surrounding controversy, if placing him within a lineage of American art-music composers, his ventures into doo-wop "neoclassicism" was not entirely different from the stylistic explorations and ideas of Rochberg and Del Tredici.[94]

One scholar commented that the remainder of Rochberg's career was a self-reinvention in which he sought to expel harsh modernism and replace it with beautiful music akin to that of Beethoven and Mahler.[95] While the act of revitalizing what was once popular is not without merits, it is also not without criticism. To Rochberg's detractors, postmodernism in the 1960s avoided pertinent social commentary, creating a simulacrum of the Eighteenth-and-Nineteenth Century composers he emulated. In short, without an ability to interact with the current world in a meaningful and progressive way,

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[93] Zappa, *Real Book*, 88.
[94] Jonathan W. Bernard, "Tonal Traditions in Art Music Since 1960," in *The Cambridge History of American Music* edited by David Nicholls (Cambridge, MA.: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 546 – 550.
[95] Alan Gillmor, "The Apostasy of George Rochberg," *Intersections*29, 1 (2009): 33.

the composer lives in a "delusion of freedom."[96] While Zappa had a philosophical message to sell his audiences, he likewise embraced what had come before, while seemingly ignoring the present. Like Rochberg, his choice was not without criticism. As illustrated in "Close Harmonies on a Collision Course," *Cruising* was a continuation of Zappa's interest and understanding of doo-wop practices, inspired by Stravinsky's earlier neoclassicism.[97]

Cruising may not be a truly neoclassical work, but it bears a strong resemblance to the works and ideas of many American postmodernist artists and composers working throughout the decade. Having learned common practice and modernist compositional techniques, Zappa was not an outsider to writing serious art-music. Through his career he composed a sizeable output of orchestral music, and on *Cruising* he experimented with mixing popular music and Stravinsky. *Cruising* appears as an oddity within Zappa's repertory, and it is part of the controversial American postmodernist movement of the

[96] Richard Taruskin, "After Everything: Postmodernism: Rochberg, Crumb, Lerdahl, Schnittke," in *The Oxford History of Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 435.

[97] The arguments presented in this chapter hinge on the evolving definition and treatment of postmodern art music in the late 1960s, rather than aligning *Cruising* with contemporary popular music. Zappa's early music was more closely related to the rock and pop music spheres than that of art music, it would perhaps seem more logical to compare *Cruising* to popular music of the time. 1968 was a year in which many popular bands released "back-to-roots" temporary stylistic shifts. Several examples of this shift are best exemplified in The Rolling Stones' *Beggar's Banquet,* Beatles' *White Album,* and The Byrds' *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*. Similarly, the folksy *Music from the Big Pink* by The Band, *The Notorious Byrd Brothers* by The Byrds, *Baptism: A Journey through our Time* by Joan Baez, and *Bookends* by Simon & Garfunkel all sold considerably well. One interpretation of *Cruising* would state that Zappa's early music lagged behind trends, as some of it (e.g., *We're only in it for the Money*) was strongly rooted in satire. As Beatles and Rolling Stones returned to their roots, it was fitting for Zappa to return to his doo-wop roots. Regarding *Cruising* this argument has both merits and flaws. There is no indication that Zappa anticipated any of the record's songs becoming radio hits — granted, he would have gladly welcomed airplay and high record sales. *Cruising*'s release timing was – oddly – perfect, considering the year's back-to-roots and simplistic folk trends. It is likely that Zappa saw these trends as an opportunity to rekindle interest in doo-wop, whether satirical or otherwise. On paper, *Cruising* appealed to old doo-wop, rock, and Mothers' fans, but it ultimately did not strongly resonate with any of the groups. Furthermore, considering the contextual evidence provided in "Close Harmonies on a Collision Course," *Cruising* was an endeavor waiting to happen regardless of popular music trends.

time. To illustrate *Cruising*'s place within the 1960s, I will outline the societal events in which it takes place, the trends of art music during the decade, with a focus on Rochberg and how many of the same sentiments and critiques apply to Zappa and the lukewarm responses to the record.

Tumult in The United States during the 1960s

Paul Johnson describes the 1960s collectively as "America's Suicide Attempt": a fitting title for a decade marked by protests, riots, and a growing mistrust of the media and government.[98] With the passing of The Civil Rights Act of 1964 under president Lyndon Baines Johnson, segregation ended and optimism washed over the nation's college-aged youth. In the same year, Johnson announced a formal declaration of war against domestic poverty, rather than communism abroad. At 68 percent success-rate, Johnson signed an astounding 207 of his anti-poverty bills into law.[99] While claiming to have lifted 12.4 million citizens out of poverty, Johnson instead inadvertently pushed the impoverished out of the productive economy and into governmental dependence.[100]

Johnson often boasted of his successful Great Society initiative, but the reality of its ineffectiveness combined with the ever-growing messiness of the Vietnam war caused an escalation of tensions between the layperson and government. Between 1961 and 1966 the support for the war waned, and by 1967 *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* abandoned the president. "About the same time, the TV networks became neutral, then increasingly hostile."[101] During this period, California saw the rise of The New Left

[98] Paul Johnson, "America's Suicide Attempt," in *Modern Times: From the Twenties to the Nineties* (New York, NY.: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 613-658.
[99] Ibid., 639.
[100] Ibid., 640.
[101] Ibid., 636.

and hippies in San Francisco and the emergence of freaks in Los Angeles.[102] Andre Mont explains, "the radicals learned that rock music and LSD were more popular than the New Left. Yet radicals and hippies were rebelling against social norms, and so the radicals took heart and began to work with the hippies. A shared joint went a long way toward a hippie-radical fusion."[103] In 1965:

> Johnson's Great Society programme merely poured fuel into this gathering conflagration. The next year 25,000 students invaded Washington to protest against the Vietnam war. In 1966-7, more campuses were 'radicalized.' The 'campus riot' became part of the college culture, as university presidents compromised, surrendered or abdicated.[104]

The college-aged youth could no longer trust educational institutions, the media, and the government, and their dissatisfaction materialized in protests and riots.

While students at Berkeley staged three protests in 1964-1965, the underground freaks of Los Angeles expressed dissatisfaction with society through means of rejecting *all* norms, as opposed to The New Left's academic-centered alternative.[105] In 1966, the year following the Los Angeles Watts Riots, police "raided a number of freak hangouts … and performed searches of entire neighborhoods, political radicals could not help but

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[102] Topically hippies and freaks shared similar antiestablishment ideals, but their philosophies, aesthetics, localities, and music preferences were entirely different. As the foremost musician of the Los Angeles freak scene, Zappa elucidates the differences between the hippies of San Francisco and the freaks of Los Angeles. He explains that the hippies were "chauvinistic and ethnocentric" elitists who sold love and peace as their product while playing in "the psychedelic dungeon circuit." The freaks, on the other hand, avoided psychedelia, uniforms, and mainstream pop-rock tunes such as "Needles and Pins" (Zappa, 68-9). Courrier provides further comments on the differences between the scenes by quoting Neil Slaven, "Hippies preached tolerance and love, fostered a herd instinct when it came to modes of dress and vocabulary, and turned begging … into community service… In L.A., where they emphasized the second word of 'show business,' freaks were more individualistic and ego-driven, taking 'love' where they found it and equating 'tolerance' with 'every man for himself'" (Courrier, 76).

[103] W. J. Rorabaugh, *Berkeley at War* (Oxford University Press US, 1990), 141.

[104] Johnson, *Modern Times*, 643.

[105] Andre Mount, "Bridging the Gap: Frank Zappa and the Confluence of Art and Pop" (Phd diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2010), 41.

speak out against the social injustices they observed."[106] It was this burning anger of the localized freak culture and unheard voices around the nation which sparked and fueled Zappa's early career.

Postmodernity as Defined by George Rochberg

While the Grateful Dead, The Velvet Underground, and The Mothers of Invention represented three unique strains and localities of the counterculture, a number of composers within the world of art music also felt that the changing times required new musical commentary, either by means of erasure of the past musical systems or atavism of the old. Winners of the Pulitzer Prize for music, throughout the 1960s, ranged from Walter Piston's Beethoven-esque Symphony 7 (1961) to the haunting and avant-garde *Echoes of Time and the River* (1967) by George Crumb. Like the nation's distrust of the government and its structure, many American composers such as Rochberg, William Bolcom, and Del Tredici explored collage and musical revitalization, during the decade.[107] Concurrently with Zappa, these composers sought out the voices and soundscapes of the old, hoping that composers from the past would have the answers for societal and compositional problems of the decade.[108]

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[106] Ibid., 40.
[107] Jonathan W. Bernard, "Tonal Traditions," 546
[108] My inclusion of Rochberg's writings in this thesis is not a means of conflating all postmodernity and collage to that singular composer. Collage and stylistic combination have been ever-present in American music, whether in the literature of Ives, Rochberg, Zappa, et. al. Likewise, there were notable simultaneous additions in the collagist tradition happening outside of the United States, the most distinguished perhaps being Luciano Berio's 1968 *Sinfonia* in which he combined *La Mer, The Rite of Spring,* Mahler's *2nd Symphony, Wozzeck*, and a myriad of other works. Other composers such as Maxwell Davies and Carl Orff turned to earlier music traditions such as Gregorian chant and early modalities, prior to the 1960s. On Grove Music Online Burkholder describes borrowing in the 1950s and 60s as "a way to reintroduce tonality without renouncing newer procedures… This turn to the familiar opened up possibilities and paved the way for a new pluralism extending from neo-romanticism to minimalism" (Burkholder, 2001). Musical borrowing and collage took on different meanings for different composers from the 1950s and onward, and I do not intend to idealize Rochberg as the standard-bearer of postmodernism, collage, or musical

Following the death of his son in 1964, Rochberg, who had "mastered the [serial] technique and explored its possibilities of expression" never returned to the style, after his *Third Piano Trio* (1963).[109] In his dramatic change of allegiance, not only did Rochberg begin writing tonal, collagist neoromantic music, but he wrote adamantly against the inhumanness of serialism. In 1964 he penned an essay, "In Search of Music," in which he admonished the composers' "controlled analysis and experimentation, in order to discover not only what they are made of… but also how they function… under varying conditions – quite apart from the subjective feelings of the composer."[110] This assertation that music is a reflection of our state of being hardly falls in line with serialism's controlled and calculated language. He concludes the paper by providing his newly shifted views on the composer's role as a discoverer of himself and the soul of humanity:

> The composer in search of music as an act of creation not only can discover himself in the process, but also man. For what warns and energizes music, what makes it vital and passionate, is not the movement of time by itself or sound in itself, but the human spirit through which movement and sound must pass before they emerge as music… There is that point at the far perimeter of experimental music where the composer must inevitably meet himself again as a human being, and it is this ultimate meeting with his essential humanity which I believe will eventually bring about the return to primary, root things, where it is man who counts far more than sound by itself, or movement by itself, and where it is the experience of the composer as a human being which makes the interpretation of sound and movement into the music he seeks.[111]

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recontextualization. However, I find his writings as a point of interest while contextualizing Zappa's music within the style. While Orff and Davies are similar to Zappa in the same way Rochberg is, the written defense of musical recontextualization and collage did not define a portion of their careers.

[109] Austin Clarkson and Steven Johnson, "George Rochberg," from *Grove Music Online*, 2001.

[110] George Rochberg, "In Search of Music," in *The Aesthetics of Survival* (Ann Arbor, MI.: The University of Michigan Press, 1984), 152.

[111] Ibid., 154.

His new views on music were the cause of much scholarly scorn, namely by composer and theorist, Jonathan Kramer, and musicologist, Richard Taruskin, but Rochberg continued composing as a tonal composer and defending his ideals. It is this set of ideas regarding the inextricability between artist and art which would come to define why *Cruising* was an understandable, if not necessary record for Zappa to conceptualize.

In his 1969 essay, "No Center" Rochberg enthusiastically explains the necessity of recontextualized tonality, swapping his former flowery and romantic language for a conversational and highly unorganized style. He emphatically writes, "They want to erase all the old differences, all the old distinctions. Tabula Rasa. The 'Now.' Feel; don't think. Burn; don't create. Take over the university. No more classes. Burn, Baby, Burn… Malcolm Lowry said: 'Never trust a writer who doesn't burn.' Our business is to create, not to reason and compare."[112] While siding with the students, the freaks, and the Black Panthers, alike, Rochberg calls for dramatic destruction of the modern in trade for the art of the revolution, rather than "art … [for] the concert hall."[113] Through the pages of informal, strung-together, and unrelated sentences, he sporadically elaborates on why tonality is the path forward while condemning the serialists whom he believed sought to destroy the past:

> Assemblage. Collage. A Complex of attitudes and ideas. *Dissimilar* attitudes and ideas. Surrounded by a vague aura of association. Why does a collage or an assemblage need to be created from junk? Why not the opposite? Tabula Rasa. Wipe the slate clean. Start all over again. Erase memory. Eradicate the Past. Can we?
>
> Do you reject Evolution? Do you reject History? What are you trying to forget? The Past is indestructible. Sooner or later all things will return. We

[112] George Rochberg, "No Center," in *The Aesthetics of Survival* (Ann Arbor, MI.: The University of Michigan Press, 1984), 155-6.
[113] Ibid., 157.

> repeat Beethoven because he's worth repeating. Not to sell more tickets or more records. You've got to keep things straight.
>
> Everything we love belongs to us. That includes the past and the future. We are the present.
>
> The art of combination is not a theory. It is an attitude. New problems for the composer because he needs to depend entirely on his own taste, his own range of musical experience. Sensory order takes precedence over external logic and methodology. He stands unprotected before the winds of change. He stands only on what he has come to love. He is what he loves.
>
> A collage or assemblage is a composed collectivity of objects or gestures. What has that to do with being 'original'? The copyright law was designed for the nineteenth century. To protect the inalienable right of each individual to the property he created… How do you pay royalties to the collective unconscious?[114]

In a post-Ives style of collage and experimentation, Rochberg's neoromanticism continued and, at least to him, expanded on Ives's phenomenological approach to music. Rather than rejecting the music of Mussorgsky, Beethoven, etc., because it is "old," why not reinvigorate it? To Rochberg, the musical path forward was through renewal and re-assemblage. As Rochberg created "forgeries" of Mozart in his *Music for the Magic Theater* (1965), Zappa moved forward by looking to the past.

Musicologist Alan Gillmor refers to Rochberg's postmodernity as an "apostasy," while serving as the mediator between the composer and his scholastic critics. Rochberg and Kramer argued throughout numerous publications in *Critical Inquiry* between 1984 and 1985 with article titles such as "Can the Arts Survive Modernism" followed by the rebuttal "Can Modernism Survive George Rochberg." Although much of his controversy centers around his feud, Kramer was not the only scholar to reject or criticize his ideas. In

[114] Ibid., 156 – 159.

"After Everything: Postmodernism: Rochberg, Crumb, Lerdahl, Schnittke," Taruskin offers a more sober interpretation of Rochberg's philosophy. He writes:

> The implication is indeed depressing: just as we can communicate artistically only through the studied simulacra of styles that were once spontaneous, so our emotions themselves have become simulacra. Rochberg's quest to regain the full range of sincere emotional expression that had been available to artists (and other humans) before the horrors of the Twentieth Century is thus doomed to failure: but the failure is noble, because it faces the unhappy truth of contemporary life rather than retreating, as modernism had done, into a self-satisfied, self-induced (and socially isolating) delusion of freedom. "Postmodernism," in this view, means resignation to (or making the best of) a state of diminished capacity.[115]

Gillmor asks of Rochberg the seminal question which further applies to Zappa and *Cruising*: "Whose 'heartfelt emotions' are we experiencing? Can such music legitimately speak to or reflect contemporary experience or is it nothing more than delusional nostalgia?"[116] While Rochberg would undoubtedly deny claims that his music was a series of "blatant forgeries," the question remains.[117] How could one evoke the music of Mozart, as heard in *Music for the Magic Theater*, or the pre-World War II idealism of Ives after the horrors of the recent decades? Rochberg felt that to embrace serialism was to destroy the historical past, but his detractors argued that reinventing the old was an erasure of recent history in trade for inauthentic emotional simulacra.

Zappa as an Art Music Composer

While *Cruising* may not be truly "neoclassical," Zappa was aware of the happenings of the art-music world, as an outsider looking in. Ever-increasingly through his career, he wanted the world of art music to take him seriously. While there were a

[115] Richard Taruskin, "After Everything," 435.
[116] Alan Gillmor, "The Apostasy," 43.
[117] Ibid.

number of performances of his orchestral works throughout Zappa's career, they are of little interest for the general Twentieth-Century music history canon. Despite scholars snubbing him from most textbooks, he wrote a substantial output of modernist orchestral music. In an interview prior to recording several of these works with the London Symphony Orchestra, he claims that silly songs like "Valley Girl" and serious ballets such as *Mo 'n' Herb's Vacation* are of equal worth, because they both address important societal issues, tailored to different audiences.[118] He eventually attracted the attention of Pierre Boulez, leading to *Boulez Conducts Zappa* (1984). Finally, before his death in 1992, Zappa conducted several of his orchestral pieces in an all-Zappa concert with the Ensemble Modern.

Unlike Rochberg, Zappa did not have a substantial audience to consume his orchestral music, and he explains to the London Symphony Orchestra interviewer, "I came here to spend money on an English orchestra to record my music, so I can take it home, and so I can listen to it."[119] Although his orchestral style did evolve over time, his fanbase existed because of his rock music. Provided he did not give up rock music entirely, the only risk in recording his orchestral music was because of its difficulty.[120]

Although his serious orchestral works, such as those Boulez conducted, are worthy of examination, Zappa had not yet recorded art music outside of the rock context in 1968. He had, however, found ways to integrate art music idioms into his art rock.

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[118] "Frank Zappa and The London Symphony Orchestra (Rehearsal)," Youtube.com (Climbing up the Sounds, June 15, 2017), Frank Zappa and The London Symphony Orchestra (Rehearsal).
[119] Ibid.
[120] Zappa, *Real Book*, 193.

While discussing the subtleties of his music during an interview for *Keyboard* magazine in 1987, he recounts:

> They don't realize that there is, in the middle of ["Brown Shoes Don't Make It"] a completely academic and rigorous twelve-tone string quartet going on in the background. The other thing that was funny about that song was that by playing 'God Bless America,' 'The Star-Spangled Banner,' and one or two other patriotic songs at the end, all at the same time, I was making a musical joke about [Charles] Ives.[121]

Throughout his rock and orchestral repertories, the varied quotational stylings of Ives appear. Although he had yet to record with the LSO or Boulez in 1968, both modern and common practice art-music traditions inspired Zappa's style.

While Lowe broadly correlates the two composers by suggesting that "Zappa's musical mayhem owes a great deal to Ives,"[122] Zappa's adoption of collage and stylistic crossover was not as displaced as Lowe implies. While writing about the effects of free jazz on American composers and musicians during the 1960s and 70s, Jonathan W. Bernard explains:

> Parenthetically at this point, it is worth mentioning that while the borrowing of popular musics in present-day art music is nothing new in America, the crossover efforts of some 'classically' trained composers into pop has been complemented by some crossing in the other direction: Chick Corea (Born 1941), Keith Jarrett (born 1945), and Anthony Davis (born 1951), all well known as jazz composers, have written for ensembles usually associated with art music. These compositions are difficult to classify, which illustrates a kind of corollary to the diversification of contemporary musical activity: varieties of music are springing up that respect none of the old stylistic boundaries. The work of performance artist Laurie Anderson (born 1947), comprising approximately equal parts pop and avant-garde, is another example of this trend. And then there is Frank Zappa (1940 – 1993), best known for his work in rock but with serious aspiration, in part realized, to write for orchestras and smaller acoustic concert ensembles, as well as combinations of orchestral forces

[121] Courrier, *Dangerous Kitchen*, 117.
[122] Lowe, *The Words and Music,* 169.

> and amplified instrumentation. All of this in some sense is "tonal American music since 1960" as well.[123]

Opposed to Lowe's claims, Zappa was part of a generation of interdisciplinary musicians and composers who blurred the lines between rigorous art music, jazz, rock, etc.

While Zappa certainly was a composer with a unique and mature style, his omission from most music history textbooks is of little surprise. Although he could write impressive rock and modern art music, it is not his usage of quotation which makes him unique. Furthermore, with few or no extant scores, it is difficult to appraise his ability to write in these modern styles. As illustrated throughout American music history, whether by William Billings's setting of popular tunes to shape-notes, Ives's many settings of Yale drinking songs, or even Rochberg's "forgeries," songs of the zeitgeist are an integral part of the American art-music tradition which Zappa is a part of. By placing him within larger contexts outside of rock 'n' roll exclusivity, it becomes increasingly clear that his music exists as part of larger American trends as seen in jazz, art music, and even the visual arts.

Doo-Wop Postmodernism

In "In Search of Music" and "No Center" Rochberg maintains that the composer and their music are inextricable. In the latter essay he defends collage as it relates to temporality when writing, "I stand in a circle of time, not on a line. 360 degrees of past, present, future. All around me. I can look in any direction I want to. Bella vista."[124] Musical recontextualization does not exist as an exercise in atavism, but instead, it is a renegotiation of the boundaries between past, present, and future. In his 360-degree

[123] Bernard, "Tonal Traditions," 551.
[124] Rochberg, "No Center," 158.

sphere of music, the works of Dufay, Mozart, and Stockhausen can theoretically coexist simultaneously, unencumbered by stylistic, geographical, chronological, or even technological differences. What Rochberg defines as the human and composer's spirit binds them together without pause.

In his recontextualization of doo-wop as "neoclassicism," Zappa followed in the Ivesian tradition of utilizing his musical background and interests to their fullest extent, while disregarding the conceptions of "high art," "low art," and "pop music." As discussed at great length by Ives scholar, J. Peter Burkholder, Ives's music drew from three styles: American popular music, Protestant hymnody, and European art-music traditions.[125] He would commonly borrow from "low art" or popular music traditions, such as drinking songs or hymns, and integrate them into serious orchestral or vocal works. Rochberg and Zappa followed the basic principles of Ives's quotational models. Ives integrated the popular music of Stephen Foster, Rochberg quoted the beautiful melodies of Mozart, and in *Cruising,* Zappa's chief citations were doo-woppers of the 1950s.

Considering Zappa's history with doo-wop and his experimentations with the style at Studio Z and on *Freak Out!,* as well as his experimentation with quotation and collage throughout *Absolutely Free*, *Cruising* is not as much of a "perversion" of doo-wop, but a culmination of his developing compositional style using doo-wop as the theme. Rochberg codifies the backbone of Zappa's stylistic perversions in "No Center": "Assemblage. Collage. A Complex of attitudes and ideas. *Dissimilar* attitudes and ideas.

[125] J. Peter Burkholder, "Ives and the Four Musical Traditions," in *Charles Ives and his World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3 – 31.

Surrounded by a vague aura of association."[126] While almost each song contains a varied mixture of seemingly incongruous styles and harmonic ideas, the aura of doo-wop is never lost amidst the "perversions."

Zappa points to his nonformulaic chord progressions and the usage of collage as two of the hallmark Zappa-isms which differentiate *Cruising* from authentic 1950s doo-wop.[127] While drastically altering the harmonic, lyrical, and timbral formulas or modicums, he maintains the "aura of association" largely through collagist techniques. As laid out by Courrier, "The 'please hear my plea' line from 'Cheap Thrills' originates with Vernon Green & The Medallions' 'The Letter.' The 'story untold' quote in 'Cheap Thrills' comes from the song of that title by the Nutmegs. If you listen carefully to the end of 'Love of My Life,' you'll hear the backing vocals to 'Earth Angel.'"[128] These are among a much wider body of quotations and superimpositions found throughout the record, and it is these references which maintain *Cruising*'s stylistic integrity. While 1950s fans would "become ill-disposed when the unspoken rules of the doo-wop credo were arbitrarily broken," collage allowed the original music to stay intact, maintain the 1950s aura, and give Zappa room to experiment.[129] Without the use of collage, or at the very least, strong allusions to the 1950s, *Cruising* would be nothing more than an assemblage of songs resembling facets of doo-wop.

Although doo-wop was undoubtedly an important and inspiration style for Zappa, his opinions on it waned from interview to interview, leaving the reader with mixed

[126] Rochberg, "No Center," 158.
[127] Zappa, *Real Book*, 88.
[128] Courrier, *Dangerous Kitchen*, 155.
[129] Gribin & Schiff, *Forgotten Third of Rock 'n' Roll*, 21.

impressions of his opinions. *Cruising* is not only an important record in the P/O because of his dedication to the 1950s stylings, but because he did the thing which he hated most: write love lyrics. Despite refusing to address pertinent socio-political issues in 1968, Zappa was not without commentary. His commentary, however, again put himself at odds with the consumer and outside of relevance. Chapter four of this thesis will delve into the topic which Zappa saw as a pressing issue which he needed to address: the dangers of love lyrics.

Chapter Four: Romantic Tools of Destruction

Zappa's Continued Diatribe Against Love

Taruskin poignantly critiqued Rochberg's music in asking "whose 'heartfelt' emotions [is he] expressing,"[130] and the same question applies to the conception and release of *Cruising* in 1968, the "*annus horribilis.*"[131] The major events of the year such as the Tet Offensive, assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., mass student protests, etc., contributed towards a varied soundscape in the world of popular music and rock. Due to his expensive tours and many lengthy recording sessions, the debt-riddled satirist from *Freak Out!* and *Absolutely Free* was absent from the general public's musical consciousness in 1968. As Courrier points out, "releasing an album of '50s doo-wop songs in 1968 was an unquestionably gutsy move" which went against the norm, but had no pertinent impact or relevant, current message.[132] Similar to the arguments made by Rochberg's detractors, to Zappa's financial expense, the superimposition of "Earth Angel" onto a new song and text does little to comment on the quickly tearing fabric of society.

Even while occasionally performing authentic covers of 1950s doo-wop, the bygone style was irrelevant and unwanted to most pop and rock consumers in 1968 and onwards. With the release of *Burnt Weeny Sandwich* in 1970, The Mothers of Invention were still unprofitable and collapsed soon afterwards. "Valarie," the final song on the record was an exasperated attempt to appeal to radio stations, but to no avail.[133] Zappa

[130] Taruskin, "After Everything," 435.
[131] Taruskin, *Music in the Late Twentieth Century*, 310.
[132] Courrier, *Dangerous Kitchen*, 154.
[133] Ulrich, *Big Note*, 73.

felt that sentimental songs, such as "Valarie" might appeal to nostalgic memories and past preferences, but his calculation was consistently incorrect. While Bobby Goldsboro's "Honey" ranked #3 on the year-end 1968 Billboard 100 charts, its folksy sentimentality and genuinely heartfelt lyrics outmatched *Cruising*'s stylistic and pseudo-emotional plasticity.[134]

Cruising was a well-thought-out record that had no audience. With the Beatles' 1967 release of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, idealistic and rebellious youths widely attached to the "romantic ideal where the true possibility of love could transcend all our problems."[135] Rather than continuing his pro-thought and anti-government approach taken in earlier records, Zappa attacked the consumer, drug culture, the sexual revolution, and The Beatles.[136] Instead of appealing to the counterculture *We're only in it for the Money* (1968) was a tirade against consumers. He critiques,

> Their idea of early rock 'n' roll was a pseudo-Chuck Berry song; and the college students and generation that was our audience at the tie didn't know from nothin' about group ballad vocals and things like that, or the context from which that flowed. And I thought that it might be a valuable public service to show them some of that could be entertaining to listen and could even make you feel good.[137]

The record was a quasi-stylistic shift heavily steeped in satire, geared towards Zappa's romantic goal of reeducating the Beatles-crazed hippies.

Immediately following Zappa's lampoon of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band,* Zappa had not yet finished his tirade against the flower-power movement before

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[134] "Billboard Top 100 - 1968," Billboard Top 100 - 1968 Charts, accessed March 4, 2020, https://web.archive.org/web/20101125102556/http://longboredsurfer.com/charts/1968.php).
[135] Courrier, *Dangerous Kitchen*, 134.
[136] Ibid., 134 – 140.
[137] Ibid., 154.

the release of *Cruising*. On this record he changed his stance from outright mockery of the do-nothing hippies to the disdain of "love" and love lyrics, thus further opposing their romanticized idealism that love heals all. While Zappa maintains throughout the *Cruising* section of his autobiography that the record is a revolt against the "bad mental health" of idealized love lyrics, considering the timeline of its release, *Cruising*'s lyrical content relates directly to the aims of *Money*. This chapter will finally contextualize why the record was unpalatable for listeners, outside of the change in style. To do this, I will discuss this record as it lyrically and thematically relates to *Money* and Zappa's anti-hippie ideals. Furthermore, this contextualization situates doo-wop among Zappa's other satirical texts and his art-rock. To the composer, doo-wop was a vehicle to convey societal messages no differently than his other styles.

Zappa's Musical Thesis Statements

In his discussion of *Money,* Watson argues that while the music of the record was a distinctly different soundscape than what had come before, but it still held true to Zappa's early idea that each record must have a specific message or goal. He elaborates that "*Freak Out!* used pop songs and advertising techniques to broadcast the message of freaking out, which meant to centre creativity in one's own activity."[138] Watson cites Zappa's message presented in the record's liner notes:

> On a personal level, *Freaking Out* is a process whereby an individual casts off outmoded and restricting standards of thinking, dress and social etiquette in order to express CREATIVELY his relationship to the environment and the social structure as a whole. Less perceptive individuals have referred to us who have chosen this way of acting and FEELING as '*Freaks*', hence the term: *Freaking Out*. The participants,

[138] Ben Watson, *The Negative Dialectics of Poodle Play,* (New York, NY.: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 106-111.

> already emancipated from our national *social slavery*, dressed in their most inspired apparel, realize as a group whatever potential they possess for *free expression.* We would like to encourage everyone who HEARS this music to join us … become a member of *The United Mutations … FREAK OUT!*"[139]

While the record's liner notes are a call to action and recruiting statement, the music is a further explanation of why our society *needs* a large-scale freak out. Throughout the record, the idea that "it can't happen here" repeats sentimentally and lyrically, throughout. The burning buildings from "Trouble Everyday" can happen anywhere at any time if the average citizen is not vigilant against oppressive governments, racial injustice, and abusive law enforcement. Likewise, the message of *Absolutely Free* hardly differed from its predecessor, as it doubled down against conformist plasticity.[140]

Neither making money or establishing a national freak out, Zappa had failed to attract audiences and reviews similar to the rock bands of San Francisco. One 1967 reviewer of a Mothers live performance critically comments:

> This was the greatest send up (or down) of pop music, of the audience, America and the group themselves I've ever witnessed. As musicians they were fantastically good and act professionally presented. But frankly, what's the point? An entire concert of biting ridicule, both verbal and musical – however well done – is just a bore.[141]

Zappa could not match the popularity of Jefferson Airplane and Grateful Dead and viewed them as "[having too] little relationship to either R&B or Edgard Varèse." He believed, "[These bands] provided a kind of pastel wallpaper to the hippie lifestyle."[142]

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[139] Frank Zappa, *Freak Out!* Verve, Hollywood CA., 1966.
[140] Watson, *Poodle Play*, 107.
[141] Review of the Mothers at the Royal Albert Hall (23 September 1967), *New Musical Express,* 30 September 1967.
[142] Watson, *Poodle Play*, 109.

Following "The Summer of Love," Zappa's polarizing rhetoric either proved isolating or empowering.

This frustration resulted in what would be one of the most on-the-nose satirical works of his career, *We're only in it for the Money*, released while *Cruising* and *Uncle Meat* were in the works. *Money*'s anti-hippie message was hardly subtle, with lyrics such as "Every town must have a place / Where phony hippies meet / psychedelic dungeons / popping up on every street / GO TO SAN FRANCISCO."[143] While berating the do-nothing movement, he emulated the style of Byrds with "[similarly] strummed guitars and idiot falsettos… [In] 'Are you Hung Up?' – the listener is plunged without warning into one of the Mothers' teasing ditties. This need to play with the listener's craving for excitement is Zappa's forte."[144]

While Zappa temporarily adopted and mocked the style of The Byrds, Jimi Hendrix, et. al., other avant-garde Zappa-isms are present throughout the record. *Money*'s mixture of on-the-nose satire and avant-garde strongly resembles the structure of *Cruising*. Two prominent examples of this come in the songs "Flower Punk" and "The Chrome Plated Megaphone of Destiny." The former is an overt parody of Hendrix's 1966 "Hey Joe." In "Flower Punk" Zappa borrows a similar melody and set of lyrics. Rather than singing, "Hey Joe, where you goin' with that gun in your hand? I'm goin' down to shoot my old lady, you know I caught her messin' around with another man," "Flower Punk" begins with, "Hey punk, where you goin' with that flower in your hand? I'm goin'

[143] Frank Zappa, "Who Needs the Peace Corps," from *We're only in it for the Money*, Hollywood, CA., Bizarre, 1968.
[144] Watson, *Poodle Play,* 112.

up to Frisco to join a psychedelic band."[145] The structure of the song eventually dissolves into what sounds like a staticky radio frequency, with only Zappa's sarcastic monologue about talentless, commercialized, and meaningless music piercing through the fuzzy noise.

"The Chrome Plated Megaphone of Destiny" is an exemplar piece of Zappa's serious music, akin to the *musique concréte* of *Lumpy Gravy* and "The Return of the Son of Monster Magnet" from *Freak Out!* The atonal work "concentrates on the reverberant sound of the piano… [and] the [seamless] integration of acoustic and electronic elements."[146] Watson further explains:

> The sounds produced by [keyboardist] Underwood are treated with the same attention to timbre as all the rest of the music on *Money*... Speeded-up laughter and notes struck from the middle of the piano all pursue each other with a unique energy. Compared to this, the celebrated final chord of "Day in the Life" on *Sgt. Pepper* was naïve and showy: mere beginners' stuff.[147]

Like the conclusion of *Cruising*, Zappa saved the most poignant and serious piece of music for last.

The structure of *Money* directly predicates that of *Cruising*, as it combines seemingly insincere stylistic parody and advanced compositional techniques. To draw further parallels, "Flower Punk" and "Fountain of Love" share structural similarities, as do "Chrome" and "Stuff up the Cracks." On *Cruising*, "Fountain of Love" functions as the epitome of stupidity *and* as a musical representation of the underlying evils of love lyrics. Similarly, "Flower Punk" borrows a countercultural anthem, distorts its timbre,

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[145] Zappa, "Flower Punk," from *We're only in it for the Money*, Hollywood, CA., Bizarre, 1968.
[146] This reverberant sound being on of great interest to Zappa throughout the length of his career, as best explored it in this song and throughout *Lumpy Gravy* and *Civilization Phaze III*.
[147] Watson, *Poodle Play*, 118.

and rather than inserting a motif from *Rite of Spring*, Zappa verbally informs the listener that the hippy movement is phony. Similar to the *musique concréte* finale of *Money*, *Cruising* ends with the only extended guitar solo of the record, making the song an automatic outlier from the others, as it more closely resembles Zappa's art-rock than doo-wop.[148] On both records, Zappa used and distorted popular styles of music while advocating for specific societal messages. While *Cruising* was the perhaps Zappa and The Mothers' most outlandish departure from their norm (outside of *Lumpy Gravy*), the anti-hippie message and parodic stylistic change strongly predicated the doo-wop to come.

The Destructive Force of Romanticized Love

Keeping in line with his anti-love-heals-all ideology, the immediate record to follow *Money, Cruising,* addresses dangers of love and idealization which did not deal with beads, yogis, or flowery wreaths. Zappa viewed himself and his music as a cure to a sick society. Watson comments, "Zappa … [fashioned] an art that could work like an invert-virus, operating with the very tools he wishes to destroy."[149] Zappa comments further on the role of his music:

> I am trying to use the weapons of a disoriented and unhappy society against itself. The Mothers of Invention are designed to come in the back door and kill you while you're sleeping. One of our main, short range objectives is to do away with the Top Forty broadcasting format because it is basically wrong, unethical and unmusical.[150]

[148] There will be a further and more in-depth discussion into the lyrics of "Fountain of Love" and "Stuff up the Cracks" later in this chapter.
[149] Ibid., 91.
[150] Quoted by Robert Shelton, *New York Times,* 25 December 1967.

Now having made strong arguments against "plastic people," hippies, the police, et. al., in 1968 Zappa focused his attention on attacking the mediatized mode of "love" presented on television, in books, and through music.

Although his anti-love philosophy was set in stone, *Cruising,* as a concept, presented Zappa with a challenge: writing love songs sans sexual explorations or perversions.[151] In the two pages of his autobiography dedicated to *Cruising,* he spends eight of the eleven paragraphs discussing the "**sub-Mongoloid** lyrics … [which he] carried to an extreme."[152] He elaborates that not only does he "**detest 'love lyrics,**'" but that he advocates strongly against them. He comments that "love lyrics" portray an unrealistic depiction of sex, romance, and affection, which, in turn, is harmful to adolescents who know no better. He writes, "It's a subconscious training that creates a desire for an imaginary situation which will *never exist for you.* People who buy into that mythology go through life feeling that they got cheated out of something."[153]

Cruising was not the first, nor the last time in which Zappa admonished the heavily romanticized and unrealistic version of love found in the media. Despite his aversion to standard, sappy lyrics, he instead spent much of his career writing his own, unique "love" songs which dealt with taboo or irregular topics such as urophagia and mechanophilia.[154] Zappa felt that consensual exploration was an important step in becoming a freethinking individual. His 1979 song "Broken Hearts are for Assholes"

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[151] *Cruising* had a myriad of overt and subtle sexual messages. The opening song, "Cheap Thrills" does little to hide behind innuendos. *Cruising* does not contain the average brand of Zappa's sexual lyrics as those found in "Call any Vegetable" or "Magdalena."
[152] Frank Zappa, *Real Book*, 89.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Charles Ulrich, *The Big Note* (Vancouver, BC.: New Star Books, 2018), xx.

perhaps bests describe his dichotomy between true and romanticized love. In it, he mixes the idea of the bad mental health model with the explorative variant he often advocated for. The lyrics state that not only are broken hearts for assholes, but that love and romance lead to a corrupt state of mind. The protagonist has a broken heart, and as a result, he cannot think clearly or function properly. Because of his pathetic condition, he begins indulging in his suppressed sexual fantasies, and thus finding "true love" through liberation.[155]

In stark contrast to the personal and sexual liberation in "Broken Hearts," the love songs of *Cruising* push "bad mental health" to the extreme, with the finale of the record ending with suicide. Rather than a protagonist escaping from emotionless sex, unhealthy idealization, or loveless romance, Zappa bleakly comments that romantic fantasies can only lead to destruction. During a live performance in 1975 Zappa explains the personally and societally destructive implications of the record through an extra-musical narrative:

> Swaying titanically, snatting immense white-gloved fingers & lip-syncing their latest hit, Ruben & the Jets prepare to destroy everything that contemporary civilization stands for.
>
> The crowd is hypnotized. They begin to writhe & quiver & huddle closer together. The moon & stars come out. Brightly colored crepe paper streamers descend from the buildings all around. Men & women hug each other close & begin to dance in the street (super teenage 1950 style). Zoom in on a couple as they kiss & dance … dissolve through distortion glass to a dream-sequence of 1950s drive ins, make-out parties, high schools, the Korean War & 'I Like Ike', intercut with the titanic Ruben & the Jets: brain-snouts flopping in slow motion.[156]

[155] Frank Zappa, "Broken Hearts are for Assholes," on *Sheik Yerbouti*, Los Angeles, CBS International / Zappa, 1979.
[156] Preamble to 'Bebop Tango,' *Roxy & Elsewhere*, 1975.

The "cretin simplicity" presented in the simplistic music and unhealthy lyrics is a literal threat to society.[157] Watson comments further on this narrative:

> *Ruben* provokes the paranoid fear that freedoms of the 1960s may be insubstantial, a matter of shifting scenery. This insight is diametrically opposed to the smugly superior indulgence applied to 50s naivety by *American Graffiti* and the rock 'n' roll hits packages that came in its wake. It is politically progressive in the grain of its production: hence its high standing among people who are far to the left of Zappa in terms of explicit politics.

Cruising capitalizes on the temporality of the free-love and pro-drug ideologies of the decade, reminding listeners of the potential for societal destruction. This message is reminiscent of his ever-present motif that "it can't happen here." In a consistently shifting social structure, Zappa understood that the pro-drugs and free-loving principles of the hippies was neither effective nor could they be a catalyst for meaningful change.

Why Use Doo-Wop to Make the Argument?

In "Zappa and Satire: From Conceptual Absurdism to Perversity of Politics," Nick Awde divides Zappa's career into three periods: Conceptual Comedian (1966 – 1969), Social Commentator (1969 – 1984), and Perverse Politician (1984 – 1993).[158] While discussing his early years, Awde writes, "The conceptual side of Zappa's comedy lies in the fact that everything he produced was multi-levelled while not always seeming obvious or even useful at the time."[159] As a composer, manager, lyricist, and social commentator, Zappa saw a tremendous amount of growth between 1966 and 1969.[160] Through these years he became one of the first to use electrified rock as a serious

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[157] *Cruising*'s liner notes refer to the songs on the record to be of "cretin simplicity."
[158] Nick Awde, "Zappa and Satire: From Conceptual Absurdism to Perversity of Politics" from *Frank Zappa and the And* edited by Paul Carr, (Burlington, VT.: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), 92 – 96.
[159] Ibid., 93.
[160] I am widening Awde's periodization to 1963 to include his time at Studio Z for reasons discussed prior.

medium for art and satire, but the growth did not happen at once. On The Mothers' first two records, songs such as "It Can't Happen Here," "Plastic People," and "Brown Shoes Don't Make It" provided poignant, but on-the-nose societal messages. By 1968 Zappa had worked with his band for several years, knew their backgrounds, and wanted to continue his societal critiques, specifically rallying against those who would rather don flowery wreaths instead of freaking out.

Zappa attacked love as an institution of hippy ideals with the release of *We're only in it for the Money* and proceeded to rally against idealized romance on *Cruising*. While his anti-love-song ideals remained a constant throughout his career, this was his most focused lampoon of what he viewed as a serious societal problem. As in his other early records, Zappa sought to shake listeners from their complacency by means of subversive lyrics, vicious satire, or compositional techniques. Many of *Cruising*'s songs appear innocuous, but like his art-rock, the satirical doo-wop was also meant to "come in the back door and kill you while you're sleeping."[161] If passively listening to the myriad of "truly moronic" lyrics throughout the record, the listener cannot change or reevaluate their musical values.

As discussed throughout the thesis, a record of doo-wop songs was by no means an accident or solely caused by a spur-of-the-moment jam session. Considering the contextual evidence provided in "Close Harmonies on a Collision Course," a doo-wop record was always within the realm of possibilities while the original band was still

[161] Quoted by Robert Shelton, *New York Times,* 25 December 1967.

intact. Zappa's mission statement for this period, however, placed potential limitations on what he was willing to compose or perform. Zappa explains:

> [Audiences were] accustomed to accepting everything that was handed to them. I mean completely. It was amazing: politically, musically, socially – everything. Somebody would just hand it to them and they wouldn't question it. It was my campaign … to do things that would shake people out of their complacency, or that ignorance, and make them question things.[162]

While he engaged in stylistic crossover in earlier records, (e.g., emulating Byrds in *Money* or writing in the *Cruising* doo-wop style on *Freak Out!*), the message of each record still blared through the art-rock medium. In contrast, a record of doo-wop could not easily provide commentary on "plastic people" or The Watts Riots. The style could, however, serve as the perfect medium to discuss love and ideation, as those topics entrenched nearly all aspects of the doo-wop of the 1950s and early 60s.

Weaponizing Doo-Wop's Lyrics

During the short rise and fall of doo-wop's popularity in the mid-1950s through the early 60s, the styles of the East Coast groups, such as The Chords, varied greatly to the more instrument-centric Pachuco doo-woppers of California, such as Little Julian Herrera and the Tigers. Despite the major orchestration differences, artists in both localities maintained similar lyrical themes. Doo-wop scholars Anthony J. Gribin and Matthew M. Schiff describe the common theme of the styles' texts as being "repetitive, simple, dialectical, hackneyed, and occasionally ungrammatical, yet are still able to transcend the banalities to convey genuine feelings of tenderness and love."[163] This style

[162] Courrier, *Dangerous Kitchen*, 65.
[163] Anthony J. Gribin, Matthew M. Schiff, *Doo-Wop: The Forgotten Third of Rock 'n Roll* (Iola, WI.: Kraus Publications, Inc., 1992), 21.

of sentimental love lyrics had faded by 1968, as had doo-wop's popularity, but romanticized love had not.[164] While doo-wop remained as one of Zappa's most cherished musical styles, he understood its problems and more importantly, he understood that the problems of doo-wop persisted in the dangerous music of the counterculture.

Undoubtedly, a range of lyrical themes appears throughout doo-wop discourse, but it is quite small and shackled to idyllic love, romance, or sex. In the 1957 song "Maybe" by the female group, The Chantels, the protagonist lies awake at night crying and praying for her ex-lover to return, rationalizing ways in which he may understand her affection and unyielding devotion.[165] This song presents an extreme example of doo-wop's love-inspired neurosis, and does not necessarily represent the genre's general lyrical treatment as a whole. Other songs such as "Run Around Sue" by Dion and "Remember Then" by the Earls both look back fondly on a lost love, remembered in a distant and unspecific "then." Not only do many doo-wop lyrics contain either unrequited or fulfilled love in a blurry memory, but many descriptors unhealthily romanticize their potential or current partners. "Earth Angel" by The Penguins describes the lover as an angel who the protagonist wishes to never part with. Likewise, "Sh-Boom" by The Cadillacs gives a similar heavenly description, as love would elate the two partner's lives into a blissful paradise. Lastly, in a small minority of doo-wop songs exists the single man or woman enjoying a life of promiscuity, or, at the very least, the joys of quickly dating multiple people. The protagonist of "Speedoo" by The Cadillacs does not waste

[164] In the context of the counterculture, the term "love" does not necessarily relate to romance. Regardless of whether bands used "love" in the global, love-heals-all sense, or in a romantic way, the word "love," itself is all encompassing. Zappa understood the flexibility of the term, thus creating the necessity to attack hippie-centric love in *Money*, and romance-centric love with *Cruising.*
[165] The Chantels, "Maybe," End Records, 1957.

time as he seduces other men's girls. Alternately the protagonist of Little Anthony's "Shimmy Shimmy Ko-Ko Bop" teaches the male listeners how to dance the sexual, spine-tingling dance of the native women on a mystical paradise island.[166] Zappa recognized each of these sex or love-related themes throughout *Cruising* whether by exaggerating the lovesickness of "Maybe" into suicide or realizing the emptiness of the quick sexual encounters of "Speedoo."[167]

In his writing about the record not only does he dedicate the majority of the section to discussing the lyrics as they pertain to bad-mental-health, but he singles out "Fountain of Love" as one of the major landmarks of the record. As intended, this song's simplistic lyrics fall closely in line closely with traditional songs such as "Earth Angel" and "Little Star," thus representing the epitome of what Zappa viewed as stupid lyrics. He calls attention to the text: "We made a wish and threw in a coin, and since that day our hearts have been joined, so all you young lovers wherever you are, the Fountain of Love is not very far."[168] He writes, "Give me a fucking break! Is this song about a douche bag, **or what?** Some people take that kind of lyric **seriously!**"[169]

His sentiment that this type of love lyric was moronic stayed consistent throughout his career and without exception. In a 1979 interview Zappa continued his crusade against traditional love songs akin to "Fountain of Love" claiming that these lyrics are unoriginal, unenjoyable, simplistic, ugly, cheap, and wrong, and further reiterates that "people who sing about their broken hearts are pathetic; they should fix

[166] Little Anthony & The Imperials, "Shimmy Shimmy Ko-Ko-Bop" End Records, 1960.
[167] Here, I am specifically referring to Zappa's "Stuff up the Cracks" and "Cheap Thrills."
[168] Frank Zappa, "Fountain of Love" Bizarre/Verve, 1968.
[169] Frank Zappa, *Real Book*, 89.

their fuckin' broken hearts and then make some music that's more fun."[170] If he were to write love songs while making a doo-wop record, it must be in his terms, as he maximized love's unhealthy aspects to unavoidable extremes.

"Fountain of Love" is among the most central tracks on the record regarding Zappa's philosophy and goals, as illustrated compositionally and lyrically. To further stress the anti-love sentiment, Zappa integrated the opening bassoon melody of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* into the song's fadeout chant. As Collins repeats the phrase "Fountain of love," the falsetto responds by oohing the iconic melody, creating a juxtaposition of two seemingly incongruous styles and traditions: one style grounded in romance while the other implies sinister intent. In this combination not only does Zappa give a nod to his musical inspirations, but he uses Stravinsky to better illustrate his message. "Fountain of Love" is undeniably silly, and it does a good job to illustrate how "sub-moronic" many love lyrics are, but it does not tell the listener why this depiction of love is bad, nor is it stirring enough to shake them from their complacency.

Zappa viewed sex as the backbone for 1950s doo-wop, but on *Cruising* it takes a backseat to the themes of bad-mental-health and suicide.[171] The final song on *Cruising*, "Stuff up the Cracks," is the lyrical and musical crux to the record. Like the unmissable Stravinsky quotation, Zappa embeds a sinister message inside of a seemingly innocuous set of lyrics. The lyrics to the first two verses are as innocent as most of the others found on this album, and relate to anxiety and frustration with the prospect of being left by a

[170] Frank Zappa interviewed in "Warning! The Real Zappa," *Gold Coast Free Press,* September 29, 1979, 5.
[171] Frank Zappa, as told to Richard Blackburn, '50s Teenagers and '50s Rock', *Evergreen Review*, August 1970, 46.

lover: “If you decide to leave me / It’s all over / I tried to make you happy / I gave you all of my love / There’s nothing left for me to do but cry”;[172] however, after a section of exaggerated oohs and ahs, the chromatic and abrupt lyrics which follow verse two helps verify the evil nature of the love songs throughout of the album: “Stuff up the cracks / turn on the gas / I’m gonna take my life (stuff ‘em up) / Ahhh!”[173] Following this short and unrepeated line about suicide, the text reverts to the standard doo-wop orchestration and satirical timbre heard throughout the song. During the last third, the obnoxious oohs and ahs heard throughout the record gradually fade, allowing for Zappa to play the only extended guitar solo of the record, thus punctuating the death of the protagonist, doo-wop, and their bad-mental-health.

In this song there is no ambiguity left regarding Zappa’s thoughts on bad-mental-health and love lyrics. The title, itself, is enough to make the listener wary of its content, and the orchestration assists the in-song suicide during the punctuating shriek. The lyric, “Stuff up the cracks / turn on the gas / I’m gonna’ take my life” only occurs once and comes after a short instrumental interlude. The phrase serves as a stark contrast to the remainder of the song, as the guitar doubles the vocals while articulating their rhythm. As the protagonist takes his life, he gives a dying wail accompanied by the sound effect of turning on the gas. Oddly, the phrase takes place during the first third of the song, prior to the guitar solo. The text immediately reverts to lyrics whose intent are now clear: “If you decide to leave me / it’s all over.” This lyric could easily fit into a 1950s song, as “it” could refer to anything, but Zappa clarifies that either the protagonist will remain with his

[172] Frank Zappa, “Stuff up the Cracks” from *Cruising*, Verve/Bizarre, 1968.
[173] Ibid.

lover or he will commit suicide. Again, as seen in “Cheap Thrills” and “Fountain of Love” Zappa tells the audience that the love lyrics are not as they seem, and “Stuff up the Cracks” does not go about it subtly.

Conclusion

Those who write about Zappa take on the title of "Zappologist," whereas alternate scholarly titles such as "Ivesologist" or "Stravinskyologist" would be laughably silly. To Jeffery Daniel Jones, the work of "Zappologists" walks the line between fandom, journalism, and scholarship.[174] Zappa's odd lyrics, style, and life often place him outside of the general Western music history canon, as his name is often either absent or briefly mentioned within many textbooks, thus leading to his own subfield of study. Richard Taruskin's *Music of the Late Twentieth Century* from his seminal *Oxford History of Western Music*, for one example, only refers to Zappa in brief conjunction with other art-rock musicians such as Brian May of Queen.[175] Other notable textbooks to either exclude or briefly mention Zappa include Grout, Palisca, and Burkholder's *History of Western Music* (2010), Alex Ross's *The Rest is Noise* (2007), Mark Evan Bonds's *A History of Music in Western Culture* (2013), among others. While Zappa considered himself a serious composer, his lack of published scores, non-traditional crossover, off-kilter lyrical themes, disdain for the rigidity of academia and academic music, his problematic relationship with the American government, among other potential distinctions, have combined into making him both a subject of interest for some and an unnecessary oddity for others.

As indicated by many writings on Zappa and his career, his most noteworthy works include *Freak Out!,* "Brown Shoes," *Lumpy Gravy*, "King Kong," and *Civilization*

[174] Jeffrey Daniel Jones, "Frank Zappa and his Conception of Civilization Phaze III" PhD diss., (University of Kentucky, 2018), 19-20.
[175] Richard Taruskin, "The Sixties," 328

Phaze III. These works are highly representative of his style, as they illustrate his usage of modern compositional methods such as collage and *musique concréte*, and his ability to compose serious artistic music regardless of the rock, orchestral, or crossover settings.[176] While contextualizing Zappa among rock musicians, such as May, or alongside modernist thinkers or composers such as Varèse, none have yet contextualized him alongside his doo-wop heroes of the 1950s. In the further understanding of Zappa's overall style, it is logical to examine his close relationship to a style of music that he cared for deeply, composed sporadically, and dedicated an entire record to. *Cruising with Ruben & The Jets*, as anomalous as it may seem, is the nexus of understanding Zappa's relationship to doo-wop, how he combines it with his personal style and philosophies, and what role it had throughout his career.

While many scholars consider Zappa as an outsider of the music history canon, *Cruising*'s 1968 conception and release combined with its compositional styles indicate that he was, in fact, part of an undercurrent of American composers and artists who used collage to break away from the rigid norms of the present and reassemble the past. Zappa's output is distinct, but it was neither unprecedented nor solitary. Musical and visual collage was on the rise during the 1960s, and alongside George Rochberg's dramatic condemnation of serialism in 1964, the postmodern began to take hold. Rochberg took up the deeply American musical tradition of simultaneously combining multiple music styles in individual pieces, claiming that the composer and his music are inextricable. Rochberg believed that music existed in a 360-degree sphere, rather than

[176] This short list of works is indicative of my observations. While "Brown Shoes" and *Lumpy Gravy* are among his most innovative and unique works, there is no singular narrative stating what Zappa's greatest opus or series of works is. As stated, much of the current scholarship revolves around specific works such as those listed above, specific stylistic ideas, his lyrics, etc.

linearly.[177] Likewise, concurrently Zappa's music reflected similar postmodern ideas *and* stylistic techniques.

Rather than borrowing from Mozart and Ives, as did Rochberg, Zappa borrowed from Stravinsky and The Penguins. While Zappa had experimented with collage and quotation in earlier records (see: "Brown Shoes"), *Cruising* was an exercise of inextricability between the composer and his preferred styles coupled with Twentieth-Century techniques. Zappa cited that the record was neoclassical, but definitions aside, he attempted to mix high and low art traditions, stating that everything he did was, in fact, serious. Since he never commented on 1960s postmodernism in his writings or his music, I do not assert that correlation equals causation. Instead, I argue that Zappa's use of collage combined with the stylistic retrograde is an excellent representation of contemporary postmodernity.

Zappa aligned with Rochberg's analysis of history and opposed what Taruskin alluded to as musical erasure.[178] Rochberg writes: "Do you reject Evolution? Do you reject History? What are you trying to forget? The Past is indestructible. Sooner or later all things will return. We repeat Beethoven because he's worth repeating. Not to sell more tickets or more records. You've got to keep things straight."[179] Throughout his career, Zappa attempted to recontextualize doo-wop, either through satire or through genuine revitalization. Although audiences took little or no interest, he saw The Penguins, as "truly moronic" as their lyrics were, to be worth repeating. Considering

[177] George Rochberg, "No Center," as compiled in *The Aesthetics of Survival* (Ann Arbor, MI.: The University of Michigan Press, 1984), 158.
[178] Richard Taruskin, "After Everything," 435.
[179] Ibid., 155-156.

Zappa's persistence to create doo-wop on *Cruising* and throughout his repertory and keeping postmodern philosophical ideas in mind: doo-wop was a part of Zappa's personal and musical identity. As his relationship to the music of Varèse, Ives, Stravinsky, Boulez, Muddy Waters, etc., boldly appeared throughout his career, his relationship to doo-wop showed strongest in the 1960s, and most pertinently on *Cruising*.

While examining doo-wop within the context of Zappa's entire body of work, spanning from 1963 to 1993, it becomes increasingly evident that while doo-wop was not always in the forefront, it occupied a significant role. Before becoming a professional guitarist, songwriter, and manager, Zappa spent his time learning and playing in the R&B styles which he loved and grew up with. In his pre-Soul Giants time at Studio Z in Ranchero Cucamonga he established a friendship with Ray Collins, who allowed him to use doo-wop as a mode of experimentation. Before *Cruising* he gradually experimented with doo-wop and his doo-wop vehicles, both with homages such as "Night Owl" and early perversions such as "Charva." The stylistic architypes presented by these two songs would go on to expand into the genuine tributes of *Burnt Weeny Sandwich* and the overly satirical songs of *Cruising*.

Upon becoming the newest member of The Soul Giants in 1965, it was only within a month's time in which he had assumed control of the group, promising the members fame and fortune in trade for musical servitude. Following their relocation from Pomona to Hollywood, the R&B cover band evolved into an avant-garde rock powerhouse, The Mothers of Invention. On their debut record, *Freak Out!*, "Go Cry on Somebody Else's Shoulder," a doo-wop tune Collins and Zappa cowrote, appeared

among a swath of strange songs such as “Help, I’m a Rock” and “Who are the Brain Police.”

By 1968 Zappa clearly understood the musical capacities of his subordinates and sought to use their strengths to enable his artistic vision. His still-developing management style and lack of fair payment, unfortunately, led to the downfall of The Mothers as well as the informal dissolution of his relationship with Collins, one of his oldest musical friends. Repeatedly, Zappa referred to the members of his cohort as “vehicles,” while refusing their artistic input. *Cruising* was a culmination of his critical philosophy surrounding doo-wop combined with farcical orchestration and lyrics, which further caused a division among those who took the “beautiful music” at its face value. Zappa adamantly argued that doo-wop’s treatment of love and companionship was the true farce and sought to reeducate audiences by expanding the style’s questionable practices to cartoonish proportions.

Following *Cruising*, doo-wop would take a backseat to his art-rock-orchestral-improv-jazz crossover style, only appearing sporadically throughout the remainder of his career. Zappa later commented that doo-wop is a lost art, and “there may be a few people left in the world who know how to [sing like] that. None of the younger singers know how to do that.”[180] Considering his stylistic development, it would be out-of-place for him to seek out and hire doo-wop musicians following 1970, but that did not stop him from occasionally revisiting the style while Roy Estrada was with him. In 1968-9 with the releases of *Cruising* and *Uncle Meat*, it became clear that Zappa was moving away

[180] Dan Forte, “Zappa” in *Musician,* August 1979. https://www.afka.net/Articles/1979-08_Musician.htm.

from the "in-yer-face" satirical style of the decade and wanted instead to write "electric chamber music."[181] He hired a myriad of musicians to collaborate on the final Mothers records, all of which were primarily instrumentalists. *Cruising* was the swansong for Zappa's close attention to doo-wop. Simultaneously, it was a project which culminated the stylistic backgrounds of himself and collaborators, consisted of songs and ideas written and conceptualized between 1962 and 1968, and delivered a societal message, regardless of whether the general public wanted to hear it.

Finally, as with each of Zappa's pre-1970 records, *Cruising* contains a central message about society. In his writing and interviews, Zappa repeated the idea that his collaborators were the vehicles for his art and that he worked to compose around their varied skillsets. On *Cruising,* he uses doo-wop, a style whose lyrics are almost exclusively about love, to continue on an anti-love tirade which began the year prior with the release of *We're only in it for the Money*. *Cruising* allowed Zappa to explore the possibilities of doo-wop by adding his own stylistic "perversions" which included collage, odd chord progressions, technological innovations (e.g., Alvin and the Chipmunks-esque register changes), and exaggerated timbres. Furthermore, his message regarding love-driven neurosis would not have been easily possible through the means of his general style of rock 'n' roll. By using doo-wop as the vehicle, the over-the-top love lyrics did not appear out of place. The doo-wop style heard on *Cruising* is vastly different from that of his other records, but Zappa saw no pertinent difference between them, as both could convey his anti-complacency messages. *Freak Out!,* for example, could boil

[181] Frank Zappa, interviewed by Richard Williams, "The Mothers are Dead, But Zappa's Still Very Much Alive', *Melody Maker,* October 25, 1969.

down into the phrase "it can't happen here," which appears literally and sentimentally throughout.[182] His brand of art rock would not easily convey *Cruising*'s specific message, and likewise, satirical doo-wop would hardly convince audiences that "it can't happen here."

To conclude this study on Zappa and doo-wop, I believe that George Duke's comments best reflect the relationship between the composer and style. As Zappa would require his band to rehearse and improvise around doo-wop progressions, Duke rebuked him by saying that he "didn't study at the conservatory to play this."[183] Duke originally saw doo-wop's simplicity to be beneath his talents, but Zappa instead viewed the style as a backbone for his music and a key to unlocking musical creativity whether by means of rehearsal techniques, compositional innovation, or satire. As Zappa declares in his autobiography: "Without deviation from the norm, **progress** is not possible."[184]

[182] Two examples of this being the tracks "It can't Happen Here," and "Trouble Every Day."
[183] "George Duke on Frank Zappa," (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERFUbX648S4).
[184] Zappa, *Real Book*, 185.

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